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MEN AND MACHINES IN THE NORTH DAKOTA HARVEST

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MEN AND MACHINES IN THE NORTH DAKOTA HARVEST

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QUESTIONS DEMAND ANSWERS

Through the centuries the harvest period has been one of great anticipation, the fulfillment of which required the hard labor of many men. The results of the harvest determined whether the year was to be one of plenty or of famine. An early record of harvesting depicts Egyptian slaves reaping with flint sickles. It has been stated that if we had to use the methods ancient Roman, it would take half the men in the United States to produce our wheat, to say nothing of other foods, (3, p. 11) 2/ but except for the substitution of metal for stone in implements, much the same methods were recorded thousands of years later in northeastern North Dakota. The Selkirk colonists cut their grain with sickles and bound it with willow withes. (1, p. 197).

A series of inventions have made it possible for a small part of our population to produce all the cereal grains needed. By increasing productivity per man, modern machine technique has conquered the fear of famine because grain for bread is now available in abundance.

From the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, the period of great population growth among the people of Europe and the western hemisphere, the demand for ever larger quantities of grain was insistent. Planting larger acreages only partly met this demand, because a great deal of labor was needed for the harvest. Urged by necessity, a great many devices came into use from the cradle at the time of the American Revolution until the first twine-using self-binder was put on the market about 1880. Each was designed to enable farmers to handle larger acreages with less labor. The threshing machine came somewhat before the successful binder. Together these inventions assisted materially in making bread grains plentiful and they made possible the plowing up and seeding of the western prairies and the Great Plains.

The introduction of the combined harvester-thresher to the Great Plains during the World War of 1914-18 was a further step in the mechanization of the small-grain harvest. By 1938 the "combine" had apparently assumed a dominant position in the winter-wheat area and a very important one in the spring-wheat area. It had brought about reduction in the numbers of harvest laborers needed in many areas, and changes in their distribution and use. Need to measure and evaluate these changes led to this survey.

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2/ Numbers in parentheses refer to publications cited, p. 63

Great numbers of laborers have always been needed for the small-grain harvest. Had mechanization of the harvest altered this need? Was a mobile harvest army still necessary? What had been the effect of machines on the proportion of labor furnished by the farm operator and his family? On the farm laborer living in the small towns of the grain belt? Was it now easier for ambitious young farmers to establish themselves? Had the use of modern machinery made chances to work more stable?

Did it help the average farm laborer to achieve security? Had it bettered or made worse the working conditions of the transients who continued to make the harvest? What had been the general effect on wages? By what means was it possible to estimate the amounts of labor required under given circumstances, in order to fit more nearly the labor supply to the demand? What part did public and private employment services play in bringing together farmers needing laborers and laborers needing work in the harvest?

These matters, reflecting the impact of new techniques upon labor requirements and upon the living and working conditions of farm operators and farm laborers alike, affect the well-being of great numbers of our citizens. This report was designed to answer these questions. It deals only with one representative year and only with the harvest period, as the need for additional hired labor is now very small during the period of soil preparation and seeding. 3/

For more than half a century the West North Central States (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas) have been the most significant small-grain producing areas in this country. Of these States, Kansas and North Dakota have accounted for at least half of the harvested wheat acreage since the early 1900's. Together they are typical of conditions found in this major producing area.

It was known in advance of the survey that mechanization had reached much higher levels in Kansas than in North Dakota, and, as it was desirable to include a good representation of all major harvest methods, the study on which this report is based was centered in the latter State and the work in Kansas was limited to a confirming check. Thus, although more intensive work was done in one State, most of the findings, with the minor exception of those relating to migration into specific localities, were applicable to the Great Plains area generally.

In the year of the survey, 1938, North Dakota was still recovering from its double disasters of the earlier '30's--those of drought and depression. These had forced large proportions of the farmers to accept relief or to abandon their farms, especially in the western half of the State. The Nation had not fully recovered from the depression years. Large numbers of unemployed laborers were seeking work. When they learned that North Dakota was to have the best small-grain harvests in several years, thousands of laborers flocked into the State hunting for work. At times there was a very considerable oversupply of labor.

3/ The tables derived from data obtained by field workers making this survey may be obtained upon application to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

Continued economic improvement in and out of agriculture since 1938 has advanced general employment and mechanization on farms. To that improvement must now be added the growing impact of the defense and war emergency to further reduce unemployment and labor surplus and to bring changes in farm-production goals, notably an increase of livestock and livestock products, and a decrease of wheat. On the other hand, war will tend to retard mechanization on the farms.

By the season of 1941, the oversupply of harvest labor encountered in 1938 had dwindled. But these conditions of the harvest labor market may occur again, very possibly in the reaction following the present emergency. Whenever they occur, they should be dealt with promptly; the labor-supply data of this report may then be again pertinent. No significant new developments have occurred to affect the validity of the demand factors here described, nor is it likely that the harvest laborer of 1942, whatever his origin, will differ greatly from his counterpart of 1938 in social and economic characteristics.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

"I don't ever make the harvest unless there's nothing else to do," said a man from Iowa. "There's nothing in it."

His story was like that of thousands who come yearly to North Dakota in search of work which often does not pay expenses, to say nothing of making a surplus. Harvest wages for a usual working day of from 10 to 11 hours averaged about \$2.50 in 1938, and were closer to \$2 in 1939 when a larger crop brought in more men.

The story of large earnings to be made in the grain harvest, like the story of vast numbers of harvest hands working north with the ripening grain has been, and is, a myth. There have been enough actual occurrences of high wage rates and exceptional earnings to provide backgrounds for rumors which are soon magnified and generally accepted as fact. Yet even when the largest harvest army was required and wages were at their peak, between the years 1918 and 1921, it was the exceptional man who had the luck to make a largesum, and the south-to-north movement of men furnished only a small percentage of the harvest help in North Dakota. (6, pp. 16-22).

Probably more than half the estimated 25,000 to 30,000 transient harvest laborers who found work in North Dakota in 1938 had homes in Minnesota or Wisconsin. (For definitions of classes of labor found working in the harvest, see page 59.) How many came to North Dakota and were unable to find harvest jobs is not known, but as reports made by the North Dakota Employment Service indicate that there were 2 to 3 men available for each job, the total number must have been large.

Less than 1 in 10 of the transients interviewed in 1938 had worked in the harvest south of North Dakota. Two-thirds had had previous general farm experience. Only a handful were making their first harvest. Of more than 2,000 hired harvest hands interviewed, none had net harvest earnings of as much as \$100, while the average was well under \$30.

The amount of work to be obtained, either by local residents or transients, varied in inverse proportion to the ability of occupants of farms themselves to furnish the necessary harvest labor. Local residents received the first call and provided by far the largest proportion of the labor used for all but the threshing operation, and their relative numbers seemed to be increasing. Thus, while there was a decreasing employment of regular hired men -- who were farm occupants in a very real sense -- the reverse was true of family labor. In fact, a well-defined "backing up" of farm youth could be noted because of shortage of work in the cities. These young men and young women faced a situation which was far from the American tradition of independence. The same held to a marked extent with the youth of the villages and towns, who, prevented from city employment, found less and less work on the farms because of economic conditions and increasing use of machinery.

Combines, which average three times more efficient as regards labor used than other types of equipment, tend to increase the acreage that can be harvested by the labor force living on the farm, and thus, to cut down both the immediate and total chances for employment for hired labor. In passing, it is worthy of note that mechanized equipment for handling small grains had reached in 1938 as high stage of development for each preceding crop operation as well as for harvesting. Thus, plowing and seeding could be accomplished with very little hired labor; and with only a relatively small increase at harvest time, the labor force on the farm could harvest the crop.

Yet another effect upon chances for harvest employment in 1938 (and now) was directly the result of the combine, which, by decreasing employment, had served to increase the surplus of available men over available jobs. In a post-war period, insofar as the farmers can get such equipment, it will follow that any serious effort to increase the wages of harvest labor -- through organization or by any other method -- would bring an immediate increase of the rate of mechanization in an effort to reduce expenses. The result would be less employment of hired labor and the breakdown of this movement to increase wage rates. Similarly, a shortage of harvest laborers, caused by better returns for labor elsewhere, could be quickly met by farm operators with increased mechanization, and this development appears more probable than a return to a \$6-a-day wages. Even if there were a drastic shortage of manpower, it is doubtful whether these wages would come back, for by combine methods a farm operator and his womenfolk could probably reap the grain with little extra help if they made up their minds to do so.

In addition to the spectacular effect of mechanization, such factors as the type of farm operations, size of farms, amount and seasonal distribution of rainfall, insect infestation, and plant disease, directly affect the opportunities for working in the harvest. Paradoxically, a good crop may bring an oversupply of laborers, and a poor crop may bring a labor shortage; the difference lies in the number of outsiders who come to the harvest on the strength of crop reports and "grapevine rumors."

Most workers available for paid harvest employment--both transients and local residents--have always been native-born whites. Half who were interviewed in 1938 were less than 25 years of age. Nearly one-fifth had acquired skilled trades which they practiced only a small part of the year, and their most usual extent of formal schooling was eight grades. Clearly, here was a group of individuals who, with minor exceptions, were highly employable. Yet their work record during the preceding year was one of shifting jobs and low earnings, and their ownership of property was negligible. Among transients, the record of participation in community activities was very meager.

Asked their greatest problem the answers of all groups clustered around three points: Finding steady work; improving working conditions mainly with respect to wages and hours; and getting better crops and better crop prices. Asked what action they thought the Government might take to help them, their most numerous answers were corollaries to their problems: Provision of financial security for farmers; improvement of working conditions by governmental action; and increasing present relief work.

The authors believe that one effective and relatively inexpensive aid might be given by providing at least minimum essential camping and sanitary facilities at some points on the eastern edge of the State where hundreds of migratory laborers congregate. These places might also be used as centers for employment information, sometimes preventing hopeless wandering around the State.

Compelling economic necessity brought most of the transients who came to the harvest. It likewise brought the jobless from local towns and villages and was the chief reason for the exchange of work among neighbors. It has kept hired and family workers on the farm.

Thus the basic human problems which the harvest period presents cannot be dissociated from the general economic problem. When unemployment affects farmers and farm laborers alike, it helps to destroy the market for farm goods, and at the same time releases multitudes of men to seek in desperation for work wherever it may be found. A glut in the farm-labor market acts like a glut anywhere else in the economic system: it depresses the price of the surplus commodity--in this case the wage. This inability to maintain stable earning power and the "American standard of living" provides a potential danger of serious proportions. In a democracy the aim must be to assure all groups the usual rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship.

At best, work in the harvest offers but poor solution to this problem, and an improved situation for the various types of laborers interviewed appears to depend primarily upon employment at other than agricultural occupations, if that solution requires continuation of the wage relationship. So many of those making the harvest claim agriculture as their primary occupation that such a shift would be difficult, even if openings could be found, but their main hope seems to lie in such a shift.

Within the harvest, increased reliance by farmers and would-be harvest

Farm acreages are comparatively large; the average of 462 in 1935 rose to 513 in 1940; was somewhere between these two figures in 1938.

Labor Used in the North Dakota Harvest

The total small-grain acreage in North Dakota in 1938 was somewhat smaller than usual, but nearly 12,400,000 acres of wheat, oats, barley, rye, and flax were harvested. Approximately 3,150,000 man-days of labor were needed to bring in this crop. 5/

Had no combines been used, about 640,000 additional man-days of labor would have been required, an increase over actual labor use of approximately 20 percent. In 1938, one-fourth of all grain was harvested by combines, nearly 6 percent by headers, about one-tenth of one percent by miscellaneous methods, and the remainder by binders.

In quantity of labor used, combines ranged from two and one-half to four times as efficient as other methods; for every man day used on a combine, from one and one-half to three additional man days of labor were required by header or binder-thresh methods to harvest the same acreage. The combine cut and threshed 25.4 percent of the small-grain acreage on the farms surveyed in 10.6 percent of the total man days needed to do the entire harvesting.

A comparison between the proportion of grain cut by the methods shown, with total labor used by these methods, gave further evidence of the efficiency of combines in labor use. It is interesting that the use of combines in North Dakota represents a trend which has developed from the introduction of the first combine there, probably early in the 1920's, to the harvesting of one-fourth of all grain in 1938.

The increased use of combines since their introduction did not mean a total displacement of transient laborers in 1938, nor since. The number of transients who obtained work in the North Dakota harvest in 1938 numbered from 25,000 to 30,000; the number of local laborers hired was considerably greater. Most of the transients worked in the Red River Valley and in the northern part of the State as far west as Minot.

In practice, the bulk of harvest work for a given locality was done within about 5 weeks, although on a considerable number of farms, harvesters began a week earlier or ended 10 days later than this period. The average number of days of actual work ranged from less than 10 to nearly 20 for the farms sampled. Work on individual farms ranged from 1 to 36 days.

5/ Estimate obtained by relating man-day requirements for the acreage of grain covered by the sample to the entire North Dakota small-grain acreage as reported by the State Agricultural Statistician. See page 59 for detailed description of method.

The harvest season started with binding and drove to a climax about 5 weeks later during the peak of threshing. Binding had to be done within 2 weeks in order to secure maximum yields. Bound wheat is shocked and allowed to stand to cure for threshing. This leaves a period in which harvest labor operations are suspended except for combining, which begins after the binding starts, and ends before the threshing is over. An average of 6 working days per week was the usual practice in 1938. Thus there were 42 working days in the 7 weeks during which some harvest work was under way. As the farm groups tended to work the same number of days as the harvest lasted on their own farms, this source of labor was utilized from one-fourth to one-half of the entire available harvest season.

Analysis of the sources of harvest labor used in 1938 indicates that there was an average of two able-bodied men living on each farm, available and used for harvest work. If, as was the case, this force worked for less than 50 percent of the harvest season, it becomes evident that the distribution of available labor is a major factor in any analysis of labor requirements. Indeed, if a "perfect" distribution of all available farm labor over a 7-week period were possible, the entire 1938 harvest in North Dakota could have been brought in without adding any labor to that living on the farms. Such a distribution is improbable if not impossible, but it appears certain that labor living on North Dakota farms plus local city and village labor available for hire, could have performed all necessary work, granting even a 50-percent effective distribution of available labor.

Actually, workers resident on farms performed more than half of all work done (53.8 percent), if the exchange work is added to that done by farm operators, members of their families, and regular hired men. But these same groups constituted less than half of the total labor supply (43.4 percent), and it is evident that they accomplished more work in proportion to their numbers than did laborers hired only for the harvest. These farm groups did 88 percent of the binding and a large part of the heading, shocking, swathing, and combining--both pick-up and direct--leaving thrashing as the great user of hired labor.

These same groups engaged in decidedly the largest number of tasks in the harvest. Farm operators had the greatest variety, an average of 2.3. Farm family and regular hired laborers did not average quite two tasks each; other hired laborers usually worked at only one.

This evidence that the great proportion of the work of reaping grain was done by the resident farm labor force suggests that additional labor--particularly transient labor--was a convenience rather than an absolute necessity. Thus, although it is true that grain must be cut when ready, so that shattering will be prevented, this part of the work was being done mainly without outside help. And once the grain is in the shock, where the danger of damage is diminished, there is less urgency for immediate handling. It would take the local labor force longer to do the threshing than if aided by hired

labor, but there is usually sufficient time for it. However, more farmers would have to exchange labor and equipment.

The conclusion is inescapable that the peak requirements of threshing provided the real necessity for the use of non farm labor, and that a different management of this part of the work would have enabled farmers and the labor force at their immediate command to do a much greater proportion of the entire job. As will be shown later, the larger farms were most likely to reduce their labor needs through the use of combines, and the requirements of such farms did not materially alter this conclusion.

Causes of Variation in Harvest-Labor Requirements

The use of harvest labor varied greatly from farm to farm, even when acreages were equal. Many causes of variation can be identified and measured. The effect of harvest method-combine as against binder-thresh-has been mentioned. Data were gathered showing also the effect upon labor requirements of size of farm, stand of straw, size of equipment, power used, and hours worked per day.

Many significant causes of variation remain. Concerning some of them no data were gathered. In other instances they cannot be objectively measured. Thus, quality of management-both of men and of machines-is an intangible but highly important factor in the efficiency of harvest work. This is particularly true when older equipment is used; and the age of equipment is itself an obviously significant factor although difficult to measure. A heavy growth of thistles in the field-which no good farmer likes to allow-might have a greater effect upon the rate for shocking than many other factors.

As a result of both the measurable and the intangible factors, labor requirements per 100 acres varied greatly between farms. From county to county, the amount of labor used showed direct relationship to such factors as machine technique, stand of straw, and size of equipment. However, data for labor use per 100 acres on individual farms showed such a long range from the most to the least efficient farm as to indicate that the average rate of work taken from these data has little application as a means of determining a "normal" rate on a particular farm. The validity of these figures rests upon their use over a large number of cases at least for all farms in a county.

Some causes of variation in man-day requirements are next considered.

Natural Causes

Among the many considerations affecting the decision of a farm operator to combine or to bind and thresh his grain is the question of saving straw for feed. Reports given by farm operators indicated that a definite relationship existed between the type of farm, whether cash-crop or livestock, and the use of binder-thresh or combine methods, with the livestock operators using the older straw-saving method in greater proportions.

Condition of the crop had a measurable effect upon labor requirements. As exceptionally good or bad conditions near the end of the growing season may mean that yield is a very poor means of measuring labor requirements, the stand of straw was used as a measurement of crop condition. As it is in part a subjective measurement, stand of straw has limitations as a means of comparing one county with another, but its relationship with labor use was so general as to provide evidence of the validity of this test. Judgment as to what constituted "heavy" straw might vary between the Red River Valley and western North Dakota, but that judgment would be fairly uniform in a particular county. The variation caused by the greater amount of labor needed to handle heavy straw, was nearly 30 percent within a single county for the binder-thresh method. Because the combine clips only the heads of grain, the quantity of straw has no appreciable effect upon combine labor requirements.

The shortness of the 4-month growing season affects labor requirements. Varieties of grain that mature quickly are favored, and the harvest period produces peak labor needs well above those required by crops like corn, which can be harvested over a longer period. The northern part of the State is generally from 10 days to 2 weeks behind the southern part.

Usually the harvest progresses from field to field, with rye, barley, oats, wheat, and flax being cut in about that order. At times, however, hot weather prevailing while the grain is ripening will bring all grain on together, and may even ripen the grain in the northern tier of counties at the same time as in the southern, creating a much more intense demand for harvest labor.

The amount of rainfall likewise may change the opportunities for harvest hire. In drought years, naturally, the demand is small. A wet spring, on the other hand, will produce a heavy stand of straw, which will raise labor requirements materially. During the actual harvest operations, rain may mean laying off the crews—a delay that will bring an intensified and apparently higher demand when the work opens again—whereas good harvest weather may tempt the farmer to let grain cut with a binder lie in the field instead of shocking it. Again, wet weather, because it reduces the combining, tends to increase labor demands, or at least to lengthen the season, for the binder-thresh method requires more man-days per acre handled.

Grasshoppers were numerous in most of the western counties of North Dakota in 1938; this prompted many operators to cut grain "on the green side", and to hire additional labor to speed up operations. An imminent rust epidemic may have the same result. Then, too, the price of grain may affect the demand for labor. When prices are low there is a temptation to get the crop in with as little hired work as possible, even though some grain may be lost; on the contrary, when good prices are expected, farmers use more labor to save as much grain as practicable.

Power

The effect of power source could be directly measured only for headers and binders for the other equipment was almost universally tractor powered. Tractor-drawn headers required slightly less labor, tractor-drawn binders slightly more than the same size equipment drawn with horses. This seeming contradiction concerning the labor efficiency of tractor-drawn as against horse-drawn binders is explained by the fact that a horse binder usually carried a crew of one, while a tractor binder was more likely to have a crew of two. As the job of driving a tractor or riding a binder is not arduous and often younger members of a family formed the second of the crew, this seeming reversal of trend may be less important than is indicated.

It is of interest that the use of horsepower for cutting operations seemed at first to show little significant relation to size of farm. But on farms of less than 50 acres, only one in five used horses at all; the middle-sized farms showed the greatest use of animal power, and the larger farms depended more on tractor power.

Hours Worked

Harvest labor requirements expressed in terms of man-days necessarily contain length of day as one factor in the computation. From the experience of farmers from whom the sample was taken, the job to be done had more effect in determining the length of day than the source of labor. Thus, swathing and thrashing were reported as using the greatest numbers of hours (10.8) per day and direct combining least (9.5 hours). These operations were with tractor power. The average length of day when binding or heading with horses was 9.9 hours.

As a consequence of this trend, data for labor-source groups varied mainly on the basis of work done. Thus with more than 50 percent of the farm operator's time being spent at binding, the harvest hours of farm operators tended to approximate those given for binding. Likewise, the hours of local and transient laborers, whose major task was threshing, came very close to the usual hours for the threshing operation.

Sizes of Machines and Farms

Labor requirements for binders, direct combines, and pick-up tended to go down as size of equipment increased. Headers and combines were predominantly of one size (12-foot cutter bars), and the finding for swathers was inconclusive. Data for threshers do not indicate any definite relation to size.

As farms were larger in acreage, the use of combines increased, either alone or in conjunction with other methods. Such establishments were more likely to use newer and larger types of equipment, particularly combines, which allowed the farm-family labor force to do a greater proportion of the work. A possible variation of such a trend might

come from an increase in the buying and consolidating of farms by absentee owners, thus reducing the numbers of owner-operators. This development would appear to be based more upon financial than technical advantages. The immediate result would probably be the use of hired labor at the expense of operating farm families.

Computing Harvest-Labor Requirements in Advance

If harvest-labor requirements could be computed in advance, the possibility of a more rational distribution of the laborers would be greatly enhanced. Such a possibility rests squarely upon ability to tie in available knowledge of the causes of variation of labor use with data at hand from year to year. Undoubtedly much can be done on the basis of individual counties.

Several of the factors of variation are available. The number of acres planted is reported by the State Agricultural Statistician, and estimates of the condition of the crop for June and July can be obtained from the same source well in advance of actual harvest operations. Data in this report give an indication of the relative use of combines and other methods; such data are also kept by the State Agricultural Statistician and are revised from year to year. Once the number of acres to be harvested, the condition of the crop, and the relative acreages to be handled by a particular method are known, the number of man days required may be roughly computed. But since an error of as little as one man-day per 100 acres will throw these computations off from 3 to 4 percent, such estimates will at best provide only approximations of labor requirements and should be attempted only in areas where crop conditions are comparatively uniform.

Computation of labor demand is but half the story. What are the immediate sources of supply?

From data gathered through this study, it is evident that in 1938 there was an average of two able-bodied resident workers available per farm. Within a harvest season lasting 7 weeks, their labor could be computed by direct multiplication of the number of farms in a given county by the total number of days this group would work, both on their own farms, and in exchange with others. Lacking a more perfect distribution of available farm labor, a condition likely to persist for some time, the remaining needs would have to be filled by off-farm workers from either local or transient sources.

Consideration of the usual jobs originating on the farm and of those of labor hired only for harvest work is important. Cutting operations required comparatively little outside labor, threshing called for a comparatively large amount, and unless he was the unusual one in ten, the transient would either shock or thresh. The peak requirements of threshing, based on the practice of many farms working at the same time, provided the main opportunity for the local hired harvest laborers and the transients. Even on a basis of then existing practice, labor needs throughout the State were curtailed by the

fact that the threshing peak was at least 2 weeks later in the northern tier of counties than in the southern, which allowed many transients to find more than one job at threshing time. The total number of transients working was correspondingly decreased.

Where transients were available in excess, which was especially true at railway centers in Cass and Grand Forks Counties, there was some evidence that large crews were hired for shocking, which increased the number of men employed but shortened the work period and reduced individual earnings. Such practices made the gauging of employment opportunities more difficult.

For practical purposes, if any attempt is to be made to predict harvest-labor requirements, it must be done on a local basis; and of the agencies dealing with this problem in the State, the North Dakota State Employment Service has the best facilities for judging both the availability of laborers and the probable requirements. On such a basis, if a reasonably complete reliance upon the Employment Service might be obtained from both farmers and available workers, the normal harvest labor needs in North Dakota could be entirely met by laborers available within the State.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE NORTH DAKOTA HARVEST

Neither the use of the combine nor the management of the labor force had reached a stage where the labor hired only for the harvest has been eliminated. How great were the resulting opportunities for hire for local laborers? For transients? How were jobs obtained? Did previous harvest experience help in finding a job? What wages and conditions of work might the harvest laborer expect? These questions are pertinent in any year.

Use of Labor Originating on the Farm

First to be called into harvest work was the home farm supply of labor. The largest proportion of labor used in cutting, shocking, and combine operations was furnished by this home labor force. Whenever there appears to be a definite accumulation of family labor on the farm this source will be increasingly important. In 1938, of 1,500 farmers interviewed, 372 mentioned an increase in use of family labor because the "boys are growing up," and only 88 said there was a decrease in their use because the "boys had left home." The greatest number of those who sought wages in the harvest found work during threshing operations, because concentration of work then required larger crews and many farms were at the same stage of work at the same time.

But even during threshing operations, instances were found where a combination of poor crops and financial pressure forced farmers to make drastic economies in labor. Thus, an enumerator reported:

"In the township there were but three threshing rigs doing custom work. These three rigs, along with two others that did no custom work, easily handled all the threshing done in the township. One

that did no custom work is worthy of further mention, in that it had the smallest crew of all the rigs we encountered, just two men, an operator and his son. These two would go out in the morning, and while the operator was greasing and starting up the engine and separator, the son would be out getting a load of bundles. When he got in with the load, they would run it through, after which they would shut off the engine; then to save time, both would go out to load the second and following loads. They ran the grain into a big wagon box, and as they would never thresh out more than a box full in the morning -- which they took in and unloaded at noon -- nor more than a box full during the afternoon -- which they unloaded in the evening -- they hired no special grain hauler. They somehow managed to keep things timed just right. Their crop was too poor to allow for extra help. It just goes to show how people can get by if they really have to."

A significant part of the harvest work was done on an exchange basis. Seven-eighths of 117 exchange workers interviewed while at work on their neighbors' farms were farm operators. As this group formed an important source of harvest labor, information as to the trend of exchange of labor was of vital interest.

Of some 1,450 farm operators who answered a question as to whether the exchange of labor and equipment had been increasing or decreasing over the last 8 or 10 years, approximately two-thirds said that they believed there had been little change. Of those who had noted change, however, 3 out of 4 indicated that the exchange of labor and equipment was increasing, and the reasons given were primarily that they could not afford to own adequate equipment, on the one hand, nor to hire an adequate labor crew, on the other. The second most common reason given was that farmers were becoming more cooperatively minded. The reverse of this was indicated by many of the smaller number who reported that exchange was decreasing; they said that the attitudes of farmers were bringing the decrease. The second reason given was that smaller equipment required less labor.

These reasons are worth mentioning, for insofar as these answers expressed personal attitudes a growing tendency was indicated on the part of farmers to meet their equipment requirements by exchange with neighbors. In many cases, when machinery was furnished the return was made in labor. Whether this trend would have been reversed if the farmers had been in a better financial state is problematical.

Previous Farm Experience of Hired Harvest Laborers

Previous experience in farm work usually proved of considerable value to the harvest laborer who was looking for work, since farm operators naturally preferred those who could go ahead with little supervision.

Information concerning farm and harvest experience indicated that an overwhelming proportion were farm bred, with 7 out of 10 transients having been reared on a farm, and the proportion of local hired harvest workers being even higher. Approximately 7 out of 10 local

hired and 6 out of 10 transient workers gave agriculture as their usual job.

Concerning the actual harvest experience of the 1938 transients, fewer than 1 in 25 were out for their first harvest. Four times that number had been in the harvest 1 year; 1 in 4 had 2 to 4 years of experience; and the remainder all had more than 5 years, with a slightly greater number reporting more than 25 years than were looking for harvest work for the first time.

Some farmers in North Dakota complained that they could not get good men for the harvest any more. Evidently, their difficulty was not that harvest labor was inexperienced - it was more experienced than it used to be. In 1921, of some 14,000 harvest hands canvassed in the Wheat Belt, nearly all of them transients, almost one-third were inexperienced; 38 percent had worked in four or more harvests. (6, pp. 10-11). The bulletin that gives these figures speaks of "the high percentages of experienced men among those interviewed." But these men of the early 1920's were rookies at harvest labor, compared with the seasoned migratory campaigners of 1938, of whom 96 percent had made the harvest at least once before, and about 61 percent had worked in four harvests or more. More than 8 years of harvest experience was the average.

There are exceptions, as that of the lad whose tractor experience at a CCC camp enabled him to satisfy a very particular farmer, and the young fellow from Massachusetts, concerning whom the following conversation was reported by the employment service manager at Bottineau:

"Can you shock grain?" - "No."
 "Can you harness a team?" - "No."
 "Can you pitch bundles?" - "No."

But he could speak good French and so, when a French farmer came in looking for labor, the employment service official told him: "Here's your man - can't do a thing but talk French. That's just what you want." Later the farmer reported raising his pay to the prevailing wage.

Not so fortunate was the case of the Texas "hoss" rider, who had been sent to Chicago with a trainload of cattle, had lost his ticket, and was bumming his way back by way of the Dakota grain fields. He was from Virginia, said he had never gone to school, and asserted that riding mean horses was easier than shocking; he intended to quit that evening. Noted the enumerator, "From the amount of activity he is putting out, he's already quit." Said the farmer, "If he doesn't quit, I'll fire him."

That the horse wrangler typifies a group of very casual labor was amply borne out by the testimony of farmers and of many earnest transient laborers. That the proportion of such men was small, was established by the same testimony.

The Roving Combine and Crew

A distinctively new type of harvest arrangement - fully equipped combines and crews from Kansas and Oklahoma - was found to be coming in small numbers to North Dakota. One such outfit cut over 1,500 acres from Kansas to the Canadian line in 1938. The increase of this practice was problematical, because competition of local combines was increasing, so rates were reduced, and the profits of these roving outfits from outside the State were apparently diminishing.

Finding a Harvest Job

The process of bringing together the laborer needing work and the farmer with work to be done was varied. It is surprising that extensive harvest experience did not seem to get the seeker his first job any more quickly, perhaps because of the high general level of experience. Then, too, a very large proportion of the men hired were sought out by the farmers in advance, and survey data indicated that many of these hired were relatives or friends of the farm operator. Many farmers went to town and picked men off the street. Increasingly, however, transient laborers were going to the farms on their own initiative, looking for work; and there were indications that farmers prefer men who were sufficiently anxious for work to hunt for it.

The dependence placed upon the State Employment Services by would-be harvest laborers and by farmers was very difficult to gauge. Only 1 in 10 laborers was originally thus directed to the State (figs. 1 and 2).

The North Dakota State Employment Service not only serves through its permanent offices, but also each year utilizes about 350 local voluntary cooperators in making arrangements for distribution of harvest labor. Local bankers and other professional men, hardware dealers, pool-hall proprietors, and other individuals with business in the downtown section of various towns will sometimes serve. Many of the laborers interviewed knew nothing at all about the Employment Service, but said the local hardware man or some other merchant got his job for him. Thus, although the Employment Service was probably responsible for setting up the machinery which brought the job and the worker together, no credit was asked by or given to the Service.

Many words of appreciation for the work of these volunteers were noted among the harvest laborers who used their help, wrote them in later years regarding prospects for work, had mail come to their care, and sent money back home through them. Many of these volunteers give much personal time, and even give expense, during the harvest season. This attitude is not limited to the volunteers, for a certain local employment service manager hired a motortruck at his own expense to send a group of men directly to jobs because they could not ride on box cars of a mixed train as they had planned.

The use of private employment agencies was very small. The record showed that not more than 1 farmer in 60 made contact with such agencies to find men.



Figure 1. *Young harvest hands leaving an office of the State Employment Service after being directed to jobs.*



Figure 2. *Get the men to work! A manager of a State Employment Service Office hired this motortruck at his own expense to carry harvesters to their jobs when they were unable to ride freight cars to the jobs.*

important as the placement function of the North Dakota State Employment Service has become (more than 8,000 recorded referrals were made in 1938, and even more in later years) this service is severely hampered by a lack of control over the influx of outside laborers. A story that North Dakota has a bumper crop and will need a great many men may be carried by the wire services and published throughout the Middle West. Hope awakens among the unemployed workers and by harvest time the State is swamped with a surplus of men in desperate need of work.

During the harvest season the Employment Service sponsors broadcast programs, but their range is limited. Necessarily, the Service must ask farmers to give preference to local North Dakota laborers. A labor surplus brings personal loss to many transients, and a social hazard and expense to many communities. A news release that appeared in the Grand Forks Herald of August 5, 1938, defines this policy:

"LABOR SUPPLY EXCEEDS CALL FOR HARVEST"

"Transient harvest laborers were warned Friday by C. F. Fryhling, manager of the federal employment service here, that there is abundant labor to handle farm work in this district.

"It is the policy of the service to give first chance for employment to local men, and at present the district is being flooded with transient labor for which there is no demand.

"Fryhling said the entire state is over supplied with labor and it is estimated that there are at least three men available for every job of harvesting or threshing.

"Labor from state districts where there was no harvest is available and men are coming in from North Dakota points where the harvest was short. These men are being given preference in placements.

"Farmers were again asked to place orders for help in advance."

A serious difficulty experienced by the State Employment Service in providing placement service on an orderly basis is caused by this large oversupply of laborers floating through the country. On numerous occasions men are sent to particular farms, only to find that the "rubber bums" have asked for the jobs and have been hired (fig. 3).

"Rubber bums" is a name somewhat bitterly applied to men who travel by automobile by the less fortunate transients who ride the freights and have no way of getting out into the country except by walking. In 1937, when a shortage developed in one of the eastern counties, several motortrucks filled with relief clients were sent up from South Dakota. On arrival, they found that the jobs had been taken by floaters. These men had to be sent further north at additional expense in order to find work.

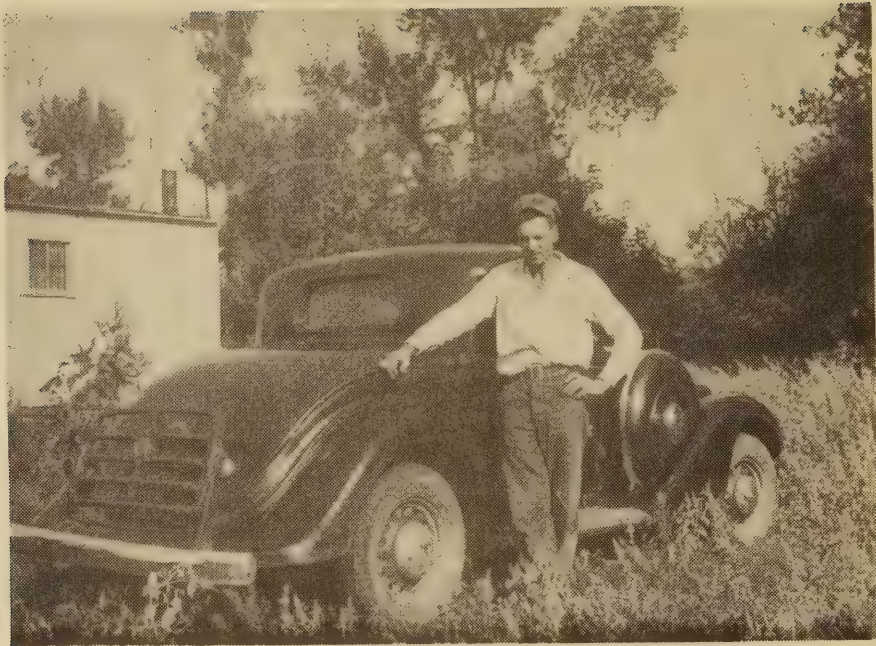


Figure 3. A "rubber bum" who is comparatively prosperous: "My car has been my home for 18 years; I'm planning to buy a trailer."



Figure 4. "Don't interrupt the harvest work," the survey interviewers were instructed, so one shovels wheat while his partner interviews a grain hauler.

Asked whether there was a change in ease of hiring harvest help in 1938 compared with 8 or 10 years ago, approximately half of 1,500 farmers indicated no change. Of those who reported a change, 4 out of 7 said it was harder to get help, and the remainder said that it was easier. The largest number of those who thought it was harder to hire said that public-relief measures made laborers scarce or unwilling to do farm work. One in five reported an actual scarcity of laborers, these farmers being located almost entirely in localities off the main highways and railroads. The third largest group, about one in six, said their own financial difficulties made it impossible to hire; less than 1 in 15 complained of the inefficiency of the laborers. (fig. 4)

Of those who believed it was easier to hire harvest help, 4 out of 5 said that this was due to general unemployment and a consequent surplus of men. A number thought that the quality of harvest help was improved over that of 8 or 10 years ago.

Considerable contradiction was found in the beliefs among the farmers regarding the current situation as to unemployment and public-relief practices, and the way in which they affect the hiring of harvest laborers. This contradiction, no doubt, was due to the tendency of individuals to draw conclusions from their own experiences. Moreover, any reporting about problems of supplementary employment and public-relief policies was so affected by human attitudes that several individuals having similar experiences might easily give them entirely different interpretations.

It is worth noting that many transients spoke bitterly of the fact that although they were barred from WPA, relief jobs were cut off and WPA workers were released for the harvest. Many transients said that the harvest season was one of the few times when they had the chance to make a little money. They thought that either they should be made eligible for WPA or they should not be put to a disadvantage by the Government through the competition of relief workers.

A middle ground in the argument over relief policy was expressed by a number of farmers who recognized that, because of the extensive use of machinery, their work was of short duration, and that from a bread-and-butter standpoint the average relief client who had a family in town could not afford to come to the country for a few days and stand the chance of being cut off relief work for a month or more. Some who expressed this opinion admitted they felt put out because they could not hire a man for a couple of days of shocking, but they expressed sympathy and understanding with the situation of the individual who was on relief.

It was evident that the farmers did depend upon a supply of hired harvest laborers at the present levels of technique and practice in North Dakota; this was particularly true in the eastern and northern parts of the State. The available laborers, to a very large extent, were experienced in farm work in general and in harvest work

in particular. There was no universally adopted orderly procedure for bringing together farm help and harvest jobs on farms. The great oversupply of transient labor protected the farmer who might wish to hire additional men, but worked serious hardship upon the men in search of harvest jobs and upon the communities where unwanted men gathered.

The position of the transient as being the last to be hired was noteworthy. Thus, in 1939, through crop reduction, there was a decrease in wheat acreage harvested of approximately 100,000 acres in Cass County. As the total labor need was diminished by about one-sixth, the local labor supply, both farm and hired, was more adequate to complete the harvest; and while one-sixth less labor was required, there were probably not more than half as many jobs for transients as in 1938. Wages declined at least 50 cents per day, on the average, between 1938 and 1939; this may be attributed chiefly to an even greater oversupply of transient labor. A further result of this oversupply was the shortening of the harvest period and lowering of wage rates. Further, the average number of days worked on particular farms decreased as larger crews were hired at comparatively low wage levels.

The replies of farmers indicated that 4,165 local hired laborers averaged 3.7 days, while 1682 transients averaged 5.6 days of harvest work on the farm. This information, of course, is not complete, for many of these individuals worked on more than one farm, particularly those attached to threshing crews. Some indication as to the comparative length of hired-labor operations on individual farms for different harvesting methods as reported by farm operators is given in the following summary: 314 local laborers worked an average of 7.3 days, while 334 transient laborers worked an average of 5.8 days for the binding and shocking operation; 4,143 local laborers worked 2.8 days and 1,169 transients worked 3.9 days for the threshing operation; and 124 local laborers an average of 6.6 days for combining.

Similarly, laborers themselves reported that 1,142 harvest jobs lasted an average of 10.5 days, including 1.9 days idle and without pay. Among the jobs were 535 as shockers which totaled 7.8 days; 21 as binder operators, 8.7 days; 33 as tractor drivers, 12.1 days; 32 as field pitchers, 10.2 days; 176 as bundlewagon drivers, 10.4 days; 28 as combine operators, 15.6 days. Almost all jobs had some idle time without pay before they ended. Earnings per job averaged \$20.70.

And after jobs were ended, it took the laborers nearly a week (5.9 days) to find another job; in that time traveling and living expenses cost \$6.60, a considerable part of earnings. Frequently men used all their savings while hunting for further work.

A more complete account of the total number of days worked by hired harvest laborers is shown by data obtained from 316 transients who

were interviewed as they left North Dakota toward the close of the harvest season. They were asked concerning all harvest jobs on which they had worked in that and other States in 1938. Of the 316 workers, 155 had one job which averaged a little over 13 days; 103 held two jobs which totaled on the average nearly 20 days; 42 held three jobs, totaling 24 days; 12 held four jobs totaling 25 days; and 4 held five jobs totaling 21 days -- all with pay. Time on the job without pay averaged 4.6 days for these laborers as a whole.

Data covering a larger group of approximately 800 transients indicated that it required, on the average, approximately 4 days to find the first job, and that the average cost of living during this time was \$4.74.

When any computation of total net earnings is made, both this initial cost and the cost of living from one job to the next must be taken into consideration. Thus, 155 individuals who had one job averaged 13 days with pay on the job and earned an average of \$34.55. But they reduced their net earnings by their living and traveling expenses, and in most cases the remainder was used while looking for additional jobs which they did not find. The 103 men who reported two jobs each averaged a total of 20 working days, but 76 of them had nearly 19 days of idleness between jobs, during which traveling and living cost, on an average of \$18.12. This, and the cost of finding the first job, had to be deducted from average earnings of \$48.42. Those men who had three jobs showed earnings of \$63.44. Three-fourths of them spent more than 25 days looking for work between jobs, and had costs of \$20.71. The 12 men holding four jobs apiece showed earnings of \$73.28; but, for half, idleness between jobs took nearly 37 days, with costs of \$38. The four individuals with five jobs apiece earned an average of \$56.65, but two lost 7 days which cost an average of \$7.50 for each person.

As numbers of jobs per worker increased, time and money earnings on each decreased. Time lost and money spent between jobs tended to remain about 9 days and \$9. Net earnings for the season increased on the whole with numbers of jobs, but were restricted by shortened length of employment per job.

For this entire group, 316 reported average earnings of \$45.02, from 1.76 jobs. Just short of four-fifths of them had a 15-day average loss of time between jobs and a cost of \$14.39 while looking for work. That it was easier for harvest laborers to get the first jobs than later ones has been noted by employment service officials, and was amply borne out by the figures quoted.

Earnings were low at best because of idle time on jobs waiting for favorable working conditions; and because of time and money lost while traveling between jobs, even though expenses were restricted mainly to food, and were kept very low. Insofar as the experience of these cut-bound transients provided an indication of the opportunity for earnings, it was plain that the "large stake" was, at best, a hopeful dream for cut-of-State laborers.

Wage Rates for Harvest Jobs

Cash wages varied greatly according to harvest jobs, with the operators of combines receiving the best pay. 6/ Most combine operators were themselves farm operators, but on 57 jobs wage workers were found operating combines. Their average daily earnings were \$3.47. Tractor driving was another job that the grain farmer apparently prefers to keep within the family, but wage laborers were found operating tractors on 74 jobs. Of these, the 66 giving wage records averaged \$2.57. At the bottom of the wage-scale were workers whose jobs were likely to be eliminated by the combine. The lowest wage was the \$2.28 average paid to binder operators; their work was often done by the farmer's children, sometimes by his wife, or by older men.

During cutting operations, grain shocking required the largest number of workers. Those hired for any other job but shocking in the early harvest were considerably fewer than 1 in 10. The average earnings on 796 jobs at shocking by the day were \$2.44, just middling, as wages went in the 1938 harvest - higher than the binder operators' wage, but nearer to it than the wage of the tractor drivers. Sixty-nine jobs of shocking by the hour averaged 28 cents an hour; and 36 worked by the acre averaging 22 cents per acre.

By far the greatest number of hired laborers were used in threshing operations; day wages were higher then, but no job commanded the pay of the combine operator. The few hired separator men (most separator owners operated their own machines) and the bundle wagon drivers -- the most numerous job holders in the threshing -- shared honors for the top earnings, with an average of \$2.71 per day. Field pitchers averaged \$2.58, and a miscellaneous grouping of a great variety of harvest jobs averaged \$2.52 for 375 jobs held. The average for a total of 1,522 jobs reported on a day basis was \$2.53; for 248 paid by the hour, 29 cents; and for 81 paid by the month, \$31.41.

It is of interest that 455 farm operators reported paying an average of \$2.46 per day during cutting operations and 372 paid \$2.83 during threshing.

But harvest wages varied more than harvest jobs, for wages varied also by labor group and by farm areas. The more highly paid jobs were held by local hired harvest laborers in sufficient number to make their average wage earnings 6.3 percent higher than the transients' in the harvest, and 10 percent higher in the threshing. Regular hired men enjoyed slightly higher average day-wages than transients while harvesting, but they were paid a slightly lower rate during threshing operations.

Sources of wage differentials were numerous, and many of them were intangible. One transient advised another, "Don't go to the best farms -- those farmers get that way by not paying good wages." As

6/ These wage rates were earned mainly in North Dakota; however, about one-fourth of the jobs enumerated were held in the harvest of 16 other States.

against this, many of the more prosperous farmers said they expected to pay a wage above that prevailing in order to get better labor - "It pays."

Some relationship may exist between wage rates and crop yield, but it is a loose one. Lowest average wages were found in Hettinger County, the county of lowest average wheat yield. And higher wages were paid in some counties that had high yields. But the highest wages were paid in a county where the wheat yield per seeded acre was less than one-fourth of that in the county of the highest average yield.

Many farmers remembered harvest wages of \$6 per day in the immediate post-war years and expressed sympathy with harvest workers who were getting much less in 1938. They claimed that if they had better yields and got better prices for grain they would be glad to pay better wages. They doubtless meant what they said. But, clearly, other determinants than crop yields and grain prices operated here to decide wage rates, although yield and price were by no means negligible.

Perhaps the most significant of these other determinants was the distance of any farm area in question from main communication arteries, especially from trunk-line railroads. Proximity to the two transcontinental main-lines that cross North Dakota from east to west - the direction of maximum labor flow into the State - assured an abundant labor supply. Along these main railways surplus laborers accumulated in transient centers at the larger towns and "jungled up" near railroad sidings.

At Fargo the transients swarmed about the employment offices. Farther west they appeared in such numbers that police kept them moving. In one city their jungles were broken up each day about noon; their panhandlers were harried on the streets; they were ordered out of town when they were found declining work at going wages; their hungry were fed at public expense, and many were bedded in the county jail. In the county from which emanated the most specific accounts of police concern with transients, the harvest wages, for local and transient workers alike, were next to the lowest of any county. And next lowest wages were paid in the valley county where the grain yield was bettered by only one other county among the eight, but which is the eastern point of entry for two transcontinental railroads. "The gas station man in town said the farmers were paying 30 cents an hour," said a brawny spike pitcher in that county, "and this man is paying only 25 cents. But I took this job instead of looking several days for work at 30 cents, and then maybe not getting it."

Work of Farm Residents for Hire

Important as the harvest is in the economy of the nation, and important as it is for the livelihood of the thousands it seasonally employs, the earnings of these men - like the earnings of many of the farmers themselves - were small indeed. An occupation essential to the survival of 125 million persons was a niggardly rewarder in 1938 (and remains so today) but "Most farmers are no better off than I am," a transient in Fargo said.

Giving emphasis to that remark, of the 1,500 farmers interviewed, 236 themselves worked for wages in harvest fields because they "needed the money". In addition, more than 300 members of operators' families worked away from home during harvest to supplement income.

Hours and Conditions of Harvest Work

The average hours worked in the field during the harvest varied little as between hired labor and the unpaid home-farm groups, with both tending to approximate the 10 to 11 hours of work put in with the various types of machinery. The actual hours of the farm operator and family labor and hired men might be considerably longer, for in most cases chores had to be done after the harvest work was over. Information secured from operators as to the hours for family labor and regular hired labor indicated that at least 12 hours per day was the average during the harvest time.

According to farm operators, nearly all of their regular hired laborers slept in the farm homes; a few slept in bunkhouses and barns. Local hired laborers were accommodated in the farm home a little less frequently, and transients distinctly less. The transients made considerable use of barns and bunkhouses. Reports by transients concerning themselves confirmed the farmers' reports. Conditions of quarters and the quality of food had a great deal to do with the hired laborer's satisfaction with his job, as amply indicated by the informal comment made by the men during interviews (fig. 5). At times there were heated discussions in the jungles or other points of congregation as to the treatment received on particular farms. In almost all of these discussions, there were men who claimed to have had poor food, bad housing, and unfair treatment. This group was matched by those who staunchly defended the conditions on the farms on which they had worked, and North Dakota farmers in general. Said one, "The farmer I just finished working for brought me 12 miles into town, although a freight train goes by his place, and then he wanted to pay my lodging for the night."

Wage rates, it appears, are not the only means of competing for the most competent labor. The farmer who sets a good table and provides for the comfort of his men, as one farmer did by setting up a shower behind his barn, soon becomes known by way of "the grapevine" and never lacks for good men. Conversely, instances were found where higher wages had to be paid by farmers whose table and living conditions were notoriously poor.

Grain farming has been, and is, the most important industry in North Dakota. The job of putting by the harvest is by far the largest job to be accomplished during the year. Insofar as hired labor is required, an oversupply of floating labor provides farm operators a buyers market. The result is less fortunate for those on the road, and the question must be raised whether the social problems brought about by a surplus of destitute and at times desperate men do not

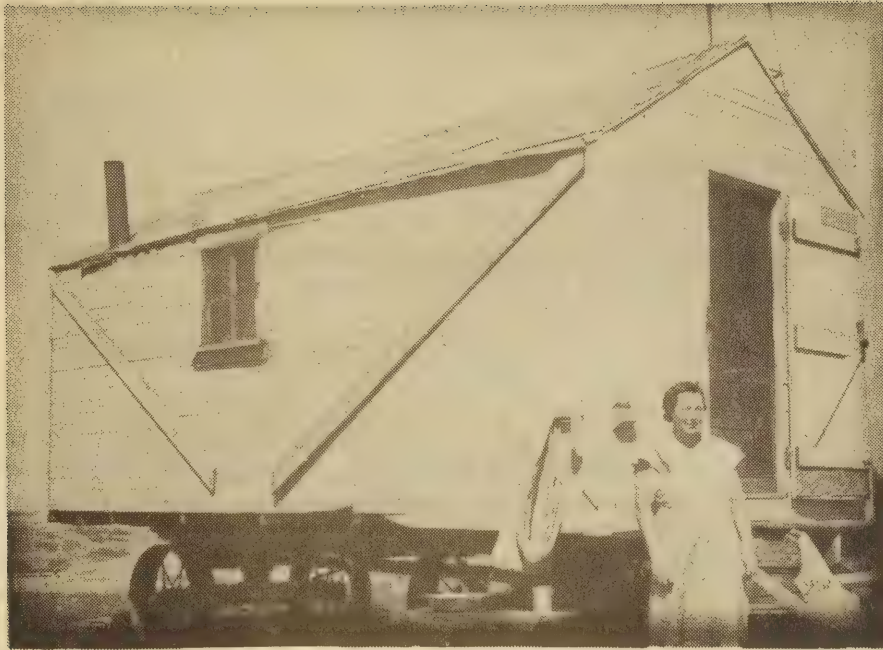


Figure 5. *A cook car: in the compact and spotless interior this cook had a full-time job cooking for 20 to 25 harvesters with big appetites.*



Figure 6. *Riding the freight—a common sight in the harvest areas.*

outweigh any immediate economic advantage. Such circumstances existed in 1938, and are likely to be repeated. What manner of people were thus affected, and what were their basic problems? These are considered in succeeding pages.

TRANSIENTS: THEIR EXPERIENCES AND PROBLEMS

Most of the transients interviewed were usually on the road from April to November. Only during the winter were as many as 4 out of 5 at home; in July and August only 1 out of 4 usually was at home. Because the transients were thus footloose, they had problems that were not shared by the remaining labor-source groups.

Harvest Work before Arrival in North Dakota

Contrary to usual impression, fewer than one-third of the transients came from harvesting earlier in the season in other States in 1938; only 1 in 12 had followed the harvest north from the winter-wheat states of Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. (6, p. 21-2). Minnesota's harvest had engaged more of them than the harvest of any other state—in fact more than one-third of those who had harvest work before coming to North Dakota. Almost one-fourth had harvested in Kansas, about one-sixth in South Dakota, one-eighth in Iowa, one-eighth in Nebraska, 1 out of 20 in Wisconsin, and the rest in 15 other states. Of those who had done any harvesting outside of North Dakota 7 out of 10 had been working in only one other state, one-fifth had harvested in two states besides North Dakota, 4.2 percent in three states, and only 1 percent in four or five other states.

A few local harvest workers (2.2 percent) also had harvested in one other state; for example, a young man, who was found shocking wheat on his father's farm in the Red River Valley, had gone to Kansas in June, driving his own automobile, and had followed the harvest north. He said he just broke even.

Fewer than one-sixth of the interviewed transients said they intended to go on for the harvest in other states. Minnesota and Canada were the goals of more than one-half of these, rather more expecting to go to Canada than to Minnesota. Montana's grain harvest, however, attracted more than any other State—more than one-third. One in 10 said he intended to make the Washington harvest. About 1 in 8 intended to make more than one harvest.

Methods of Travel

What money a man could make in the harvest did not justify his going to much expense to get there. In the early 1920's approximately three-fifths of all harvest hands interviewed came riding the freight trains to the harvest. Wages in the wheat fields were higher then and, although passenger rates were higher then than in 1938, one-third paid train fares. To the 1938 harvest in North Dakota, only about one-half the migratory workers interviewed rode the freights (fig. 6, p. 27).

And only 1 transient in 10 claimed that his usual method of travel cost him train or bus fare. Of those who customarily paid fares, almost three-fourths went by bus, a means of travel not mentioned in earlier reports. In those earlier years 3.7 percent came in their own automobiles; 13.6 percent came the same way in 1938. But for more than one-fifth of all transient hands, the usual method of travel to the North Dakota harvest of 1938 was in somebody else's automobile or truck. It was this sizable group, apparently, that superseded those who in earlier harvest seasons paid fares on trains. They were of the upper crust. "Hitch-hiking" is a better method of travel than freight-hopping, it is said, because it is cleaner and faster and the traveler has to take more care of his appearance.

Happenings on the Road

Getting to the harvest by freight train has its hazards, hence its adventurous appeal for some who have not had too much of it already. An oldster on the street in Fargo observed, "I've been all over the harvest States this summer, but I've never seen so many men on the streets looking for work as in Fargo. In Kansas City there wasn't half as many... Never saw so many men and women on the road in my life, and I've been on the bum for 30 years."

Among this moving population violence sometimes flares, and harvest workers visit strange jails. One of their parasites is the "hijacker", who rides their freights, frequents their flophouses, hears their stories, and takes their money stealthily, or at the point of a gun.

But the "hijackers" may find lean pickings in the harvest, for many of these transients are penniless. Even the owners of "jalopies" who had followed the harvest up from Kansas--those whom the freight-riding "bindle stiffs" regard with jaundiced eye because the "rubber bum's" greater mobility gives him the edge in the competition for jobs--were often penniless. Sometimes the police gave them 5 gallons of gasoline and a quart of oil to carry them to the next sizable town.

Thus, for 2 weeks in August three such people--two men, one a World War veteran drawing disability payments, and a sickly 80-pound woman--lived in a tent in the tourist park in a valley town, while they waited for money from Illinois to redeem their car at the nearest filling station, where they had borrowed \$10 on it and were being charged 50 cents a day for storage. They said they had had seven jobs that harvest season in Kansas and Nebraska (none in North Dakota), only one of those jobs lasting more than 2 days, and the total wages earned by the three of them were \$134.

Problem of Food and Shelter

Many were hungry. A transient fainted while mowing a lawn in a town where he could not make connection with a harvest job. Two were brought back to town by a farmer who said they were so weak from hunger that they couldn't work. The village clergy had need of all their

Christian charity and a little reserve of cash or victuals on the side, for their houses were specially marked out for solicitation. Half-a-dozen times a day, in certain towns, men came for relief to their back doors, to their front doors if the applicants were Indians. Word passed among the transients that certain Catholic hospitals gave meals to the hungry. In the jungle beside the Red River, at Fargo, transients fished for bullheads, and accommodately left the tackle for the next comers. Transients applying for food at one city police station were given tickets to the kitchen of the Salvation Army, good for one 15-cent meal, which county welfare funds paid for. In 13 days 291 registered there.

"The rich never give you nothing", said a man in one of the jungles, while explaining the strategy of back-door foraging. But among transient harvest workers, either in the jungles or out, there seemed to be a good deal of sharing. Half the transients traveled in company. Of those who drove their own cars to the harvest, more than 9 out of 10 said that others shared with them the expenses of traveling. Almost two-thirds of those who came in other people's automobiles said they shared traveling expenses. Between jobs most transients got their food in restaurants, but one-fourth more frequently prepared their own meals. Fewer than one-half usually spent the night in cheap hotels and rooming houses. More than one-fourth of them slept more often in freight cars, 8.6 percent in their own camping equipment, the rest in jungles, in vacant buildings, in barns, under bridges and in other chance places.

In all these hit-and-miss points, especially in the jungles, they had to carry on considerable activity. Jungles were located near railroad freight yards and a water supply, and preferably in the shelter of trees and bushes. Here the transients could stay away from the streets of towns in which they might at times be unwelcome; could cook, eat, clean up (fig. 7), wash clothing, sleep; could wait for freight trains on which to ride, for employment office hours, for the time for farmers to come to town looking for laborers. The jungles had makeshift equipment of odds and ends recovered from junk piles and put to use. They were ingeniously kept as clean and orderly as circumstances permitted.

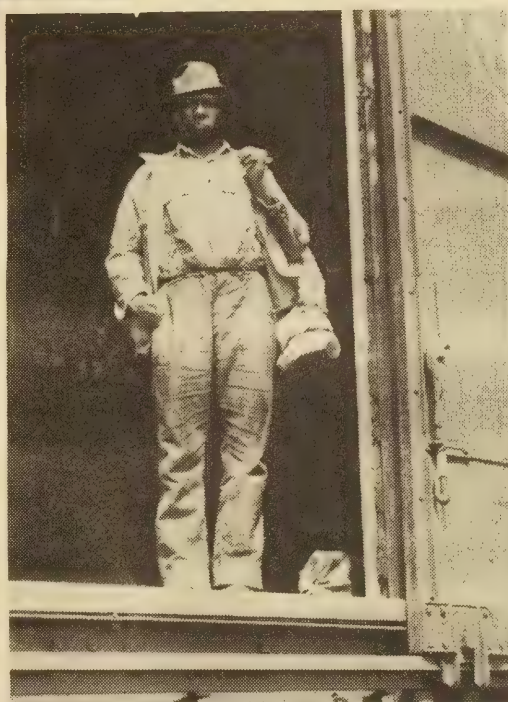
In some parts of the country, notably in the fresh-fruit-and-vegetable producing areas of the far West and far South, the Government has provided camps for the use of migratory workers. With the housing problem at harvest time admittedly so bad in 1938 and now, particularly among those still looking for work, an exploration of the possibility of applying a similar technique to North Dakota becomes of direct interest.

Immediately variations in the problem become evident. Much vegetable-and-fruit harvest work is typically done by whole families. The typical transient grain-harvest worker is single. Work in fruits and vegetables extends over a considerable period and is often supplemented by a chance to pick cotton and by other activities which may



Figure 7. *Jungle denizens kept as clean and neat as they could. It is an unwritten law among them that they keep and leave their jungle grounds and makeshift equipment orderly and ready for the next user.*

Figure 8. *Finding there was no work for him in the harvest, this man was leaving North Dakota; few colored men are hired there.*



stretch out the season; but the threshing season, which provides the bulk of harvest employment, seldom lasts more than 3 or 4 weeks in one locality. Again, small-grain farming is extensive farming, so the number of transient harvest laborers that could be expected to make use of a camp in most localities would be limited.

In view of these considerations, establishment of a camp like those developed by the Farm Security Administration in California would hardly be feasible. However, the problem of shelter is most acute while the would-be harvester is looking for employment, and particularly so along the eastern edge of North Dakota where men riding the freights stop off to eat, clean up, and get information concerning harvest work before spreading out in nearby areas or proceeding farther west into the State. The provision at these points of even rudimentary sanitary facilities such as a source of clean water, a place to cook and to wash, and sanitary latrines would materially benefit the hundreds who stop off daily during the harvest season. Such establishments might be used as a base for similar arrangements in the interior of the State. With such points of congregation, the Farm Placement Service could more effectively serve the needs of incoming harvest labor, and if a surplus developed, which often happens, could give out such information more widely and so help to prevent needless and expensive roaming over the State by job seekers.

Personal Habits

There is much more evidence that the average transient harvest labor is highly employable, a sober, hard-working man trying against odds to earn some money, than that he is an habitual and boisterous drinker. But his reputation is not entirely without foundation, even though his notoriety stems not from the typical but from the unusual. Nor is it surprising that some do drink quantities of "spiked" beer, and other cheap alcoholic beverages, when one remembers that alcohol offers a ready although transitory means of escape from an unsatisfactory reality. The instability, the discomfort, the poverty, the absence of normal family relationships, and the lack of a future, which are characteristic disadvantages of so many harvest workers, certainly constitute a disheartening reality. On a Thursday in August, rain halted the threshing about Devils Lake. That night 47 men were jailed for drunkenness. They overflowed the cells and packed the "bull pen" - a new record.

When the United States possessed a frontier, many people who were dissatisfied with their lives went West, where many opportunities were open and society was in the making. Now many of those who find themselves ill-adjusted to social conditions and unable to accept their insecure economic status, take to the road in search of betterment, only to find additional disappointments, for the frontier no longer exists. Discouragement, untempered by hope for the future, may lead both the wanderer and his less venturesome brother to undisciplined ways. Alcoholism may be a disease, but it is also, and primarily, a symptom.

Work Experience

Among the harvest laborers were men who had been "catskinners" in the woods of the Far and Middle West; men from the mines of Minnesota, Montana, and Missouri; glass-blowers and sailors; teachers, musicians, and divinity students; workers from a score of trades and from all points of the compass; an ex-broker from Paris, a "big-shot" ex-bootlegger from 'Frisco, laborers, truck-drivers, athletes, engineers, and clerks; professional gamblers and tramps; men from half a dozen armies.

Few colored men found work in the harvest (fig. 8). Practically all of the harvest laborers were white men.

This variety of human experience that was brought to the harvest commands the attention. But in the main, harvest help originated within the State, and even transients had an occupational background fairly circumscribed by a work-history of agricultural labor.

Motives for "Making" the North Dakota Harvest

Need for wages brought the greatest number of all those who came to the North Dakota harvest. Of these transients, about half said plainly that they had no other jobs, and what most of the others said was to the same effect. Some were farmers whose own crops had failed, or were put by. One in eight made the harvest as a matter of established custom. Those who made it for a lark or a vacation jaunt were only a scattered fringe to the ranks of those impelled by the necessity of earning a scanty living.

Far from unusual, in broad outline, was the case of the 22-year-old lad who refused to admit riding the freights from Wisconsin until promised that his secret would be kept. He was quick to say that he was not "canned" either from the woolen mill or from the steel foundry in which he had worked; the plants had closed. But at the end his reticence broke down; and when asked, "What is the greatest problem of workers such as you?" he said, "I don't know. There's so much. My wife is ill and I can't pay the doctor bills nor nothin'. It almost drives you mad."

If a pressing need for money impelled a majority to find harvest work, it was true that there were others not so anxious. One enumerator assigned to work with transients had the following to say:

"Transient or so-called floating labor can be divided into two distinct groups. One group, usually older men, do not care very much if they get work or not. They will probably always be floaters. They are here because this town happens to be on the main railroad line. They have stopped to live off the people here for a while, and will then move on. They will work if they have to, but as soon as they have once had enough to eat they will quit their jobs and move on.

"The second group is made up of young men just out of school or of older men who have been thrown out of work because of business conditions. They are earnestly trying to find work. They have been attracted to North Dakota by publicity given the wheat crop by all the newspapers of the country. Most of them are single men and they believe that their present circumstance is caused by the fact that single men cannot get WPA relief jobs. They believe that for this reason the WPA should continue to operate its projects during the harvest season, so the whole WPA force will not be thrown in competition with them for the harvest jobs-the only jobs open to them.

"Few of the older men complain much for themselves. They have just about surrendered to that life, but they do criticize conditions that would let the youth of the country, boys just out of school, get kicked around. Going from town to town, not wanted anywhere, getting kicked out if they stay in a town over a day or two-this tears down the self-respect of the young boys on the road. Soon they will lose respect of everything. Except that they all need work, this seems to be the greatest single problem."

Sometimes these two types were found in company. Another enumerator reported:

"At one time in the viaduct jungle near Fargo were two venturesome youths from Indiana, who were having the time of their lives riding the freights; a young fellow from Iowa 19 years old who said vehemently that he was going to continue looking for work until he found it, so he could send money to his bride of 6 months; a bitter individual from Oklahoma, who believed the world in general, and women in particular, were crooked; and an elderly gentleman of the road, who had a very sketchy work record and who neither knew nor cared where he was going."

Family trouble as well as the wish to provide for dependents sent some on the road:

One who had been born in Germany in 1885 had picked out his girl and had homestead papers made out for a place in Canada when he was 20 years old. His mother burned up the papers, saying Canada was a wild country, and one drunkard (his father) in the family was enough. (He did not say what became of the girl.) As his parents were not getting along, he left, and had been wandering ever since.

Another, who came from Russia at the age of 36, had been in America for 25 years. His ancestors had gone to Russia from Germany. He had served in the Imperial Russian Army and had come to America before the Russian Revolution, in which his family suffered greatly. He spoke, read, and wrote Russian, German, and English readily. In the United States he had done well for himself, working in the factories of Milwaukee; so well that he could buy a house and put a little away in the bank. But both were lost when his wife divorced him, he claimed.

The "palooka" from New Orleans was lying sunning himself contentedly on a freight-loading dock in the railroad yards at Fargo when he was interviewed. A happy-go-lucky ne'er-do-well, he didn't "give a continental" whether or not he was interviewed. He said that he worked only when he had to, and not always then; that he left New Orleans because he was afraid "his woman" would stick a knife into him out of jealousy.

High spirits were not lacking, even on the road, as a short note in the Fargo Forum indicates:

"Just too, too divine: While embittered women waited and fretted, four young men, transient harvest workers, usurped the booths at a Park River beauty parlor, getting themselves all prettied up for -- what?

"Two of the four youths were from Alabama, one from Missouri and one from everywhere. All had permanent waves, the cost of which apparently divorced them from most of the hard-earned money they secured in the harvest."

But if the light note prevailed for some, the following enumerator's report is starkly tragic;

"In the alley beside the Federal Employment Agency sat a slight, stoop-shouldered young fellow whose eyes evaded me with downcast look. Upon my inquiring if he were interested in harvest labor, he replied that he never took work. He had been on the road since he was 15, and he was now 22 years old -- 7 years without an honest job--was evidently a child of the depression who had no hopes and no ambition, who never had known anything better than what he had, which was nothing. He didn't want a job because he did not know what a job would give him."

Personal tragedy of a different kind was written large in the story of another young transient:

He had spent 5 years of his early life studying the violin under a well-known teacher in Chicago, and then had the misfortune to lose the use of two of his fingers when, working in a cafe for his board and room, he let a garbage can slip on his left hand. The injury paralyzed two fingers so he could no longer finger his violin. His trade for many years after this was glass blowing, plate glass, light bulbs, fancy glassware. Since the depression he had been doing casual labor, working the harvest fields in summer and acting as night watchmen at a skating rink in California in the winter.

But in the main, economic difficulty was directly or indirectly the reason that most of these men were on the road. It is little wonder that some became callous. "See these shoes," said one man. "I and another bum were trying to get onto a freight, when he fell and lost both feet under the wheels, and I got these shoes off those feet." He took a morbid satisfaction in the telling, and that in itself is symptomatic.

One enumerator commented, "It seems that the men who have had the most work during the last 18 months have a more wholesome attitude than the others."

Not to be left out of this composite is the note of optimism given by the man who said that after having been graduated from a middle-western university, and spending 6 years in Paris as the French representative of an American brokerage firm, he had owned a brokerage firm of his own in Chicago. His neat appearance, his command of English, his use of French words, and his description of the life he had lived, all seemed to indicate that he was telling the truth. He expressed the belief that while he was down now, it was largely because of his own bungling and fast living, and that as he had once come from the bottom to the top financially, he would do so again. His only criticism of the present time was aimed at women; he insisted that one may deal with and trust a man in most cases, whereas a woman could be trusted under no circumstances. His wife had left him when his money left, shortly after 1929.

But judged on the basis of many replies, the most typical reasons given for making the wheat harvest were those of two laborers. One was the youngster with a wife and child to support, who said he was going to continue to look for work in order to send money home. The other said:

"The street cars went out of business in Sioux Falls, and I lost my job as conductor. Since then I have been in the garage business and gone broke. The last several years I've worked the harvest in the summer. I've got a car, but it's too expensive to drive up here; so I rode the freights. What can the Government do to help folks like me? Quit sending WPA workers out to the harvest. Take me, for instance, I can't get on WPA, but the fellows who are on take my harvest work whenever there is any. That's hardly fair, is it?"

THE HARVEST LABORER AS A CITIZEN

So far the small-grain harvest laborer has been treated, in the main, as a harvest phenomenon, but he is of course far more. A description of the harvest laborer in his capacity as a citizen must be based not only upon his few weeks of activity in the harvest, but also upon the larger consideration of his place in the year-around functioning of the particular society in which he lives.

This society involves the city as well as the village and farm. Are not his characteristics and activities as a citizen, his privileges and responsibilities, matters of importance to distant cities as well as to farm people? Is this harvest laborer a man of mature years, or is he in the majority of cases a mere youngster who has taken to the road and whose occasional harvest jobs provide his only place in society in times when work is still inadequate to the demand? Is he an individual with few responsibilities to relatives and friends? Does he have many dependents? What have been his practices in respect to assuming responsibility, either of family ties or taking on property? What has been his schooling? What is his training for

special vocational work or experience in specialized jobs? What hope is there for his future, with respect to fulfilling personal wishes, likelihood of securing steady employment, and possibility of taking a responsible place in society?

In considering the evidence obtained by this survey concerning the harvest laborer as a citizen, the farm operator will be excluded for the most part, since his status is considerably different from that of the other types of labor involved, and his larger problems are not within the scope of this study. Likewise the problems of the exchange worker, who in many cases will be a neighboring farm operator, will be discussed but briefly. The remaining four groups are chiefly considered, and it is of interest that all four have this in common: a lack of security, low average earning power, and a lack of financial status.

Sources of Harvest Laborers

As North Dakota is predominantly an agricultural State and grain farming is the outstanding agricultural industry, all available laborers within the State have their attention focused upon the grain harvest as a period of possible earnings. This is true of the older men as well as youth in the villages, many of whom have only part-time jobs in town. In former years it was customary for these older men to work in the grain harvest and other important labor periods of the farm-production year and, with other part-time jobs available in town during the slack farm months, they often made enough to maintain themselves during the entire year.

At times of emergency their earnings have never been enough, and a birth or a death in the family often meant a call upon charitable groups, and to some extent upon the county. With the decreasing possibility of earnings during the harvest, due to technological changes and an increased competition for such jobs as are left, the earnings of this group have been less and less adequate to meet their needs. It is generally accepted that this group of irregularly employed town residents greatly increased during the decade of the thirties in North Dakota because farm people, struck by depression and drought, were unable to make a living. This tended to aggravate the problem, so that when this study was made relief rolls were carrying these people in greater numbers and for longer times than ever before.

Furthermore, the farmer, who feels a need for getting the harvest job done in a hurry, requires that his harvest laborers be able to take an immediate place in the hard work of a 10-hour harvest day. Often the more elderly village residents are unable to stand this ordeal, and younger laborers who appear to be stronger may get the jobs. Without question, this group of part-time agricultural workers living in villages represents a serious and continuing problem for many communities throughout the Middle West. Within the terminology of this study, these men showed up as "local hired harvest laborers."

The high proportion of these local laborers interviewed who had had relief work provides definite evidence of the plight of this stranded group. 7/

Labor requirements for the harvest in 1921 drew so heavily upon the cities as to occasion the reflection that "agriculture is dependent upon the industrial labor supply for so large a part of its seasonal labor that the state of employment in cities, and the wages, hours, and conditions of employment in urban occupations largely determine the amount of labor available for farm work in any given season and the price which the farmer must pay for it. Many wheat farmers, especially in the Dakotas, stated that the most critical difficulty which they saw in the farm-labor situation was the inability of agriculture to compete with some of the urban industries in wage rates." (6, p.3). In 1924 the United States Department of Agriculture reported that nearly three-fourths of the transient harvest hands were industrial rather than agricultural workers. (4, p. 32).

In those earlier years "the dependence of the wheat harvest upon the industrial supply" (6, p. 4) was much more clearly marked than in 1938. This lessened dependence will appear more clearly later, but here it should be pointed out that, although harvest labor sampled at that time was only 55.4 percent farm bred, of 2,243 hired laborers interviewed in the 1938 harvest, nearly three-fourths were farm bred, and continued in large proportion to make their homes on farms or in villages. More than two-thirds of transient labor, even, had been reared on farms, and 4 in 10 still claimed rural places for their homes. In overwhelming majority these homes were in the agricultural Middle West. More than one-third of the interviewed transients came from Minnesota; Wisconsin was home to about 1 in 7; from Iowa came 1 in 16; from Illinois, 1 in 20; and smaller proportions came from 37 other States, exclusive of North Dakota, only 6 States were unrepresented. Information gathered for 1,478 transients in 1937, and for 8,338 in 1938 by the North Dakota State Employment Service confirmed these figures by almost a duplication of proportions of the total transients from the various States.

Laborers' Kinship to Employers

Considering only those laborers found at work on harvest jobs, 42 percent had no relationship to their employers. Almost that proportion were sons, and 5 percent were daughters working for their fathers. No other class of relatives made up so much as 3 percent of the laborers.

Farm-family workers formed 48 percent of the harvest laborers interviewed on farms, and they did more than their proportion of the harvesting.

7/ See pages 40 and 41 for detailed discussion of relief.

Every class of harvest labor had some who were relatives of their employers, especially brothers and sons. Nearly two-thirds of exchange laborers were relatives, principally sons and brothers. Fourteen percent of regular hired laborers and 19 percent of local hired harvest laborers were relatives of their employers, in contrast to only 3 percent of transients.

Nativity, Race, and Sex of Laborers

Only a handful of the transient harvest laborers were foreign born; 1 in 17 in Europe and 1 in 100 in Canada. All but four States of the Union were included, Minnesota leading with more than 1 in 4 and Wisconsin next with 1 in 8. Mexicans, Indians, and Negroes were as few as 15, 9, and 2 respectively, among 3,395 harvest workers. Half the regular hired men, 6 out of 10 exchange workers, 2 out of 3 of the local hired harvest laborers, 4 out of 5 farm family females and 9 out of 10 farm family males were born in North Dakota. As with transients, only a scattering were foreign born - 1 in 7 regular hired men, 1 in 8 of exchange workers and farm family females, 1 in 11 local hired harvest workers and less than 1 in 100 of farm-family males.

Farm operators were more often foreign born than were men in any of these labor classes. Nearly 3 out of 10 had been born in Europe or Canada; with the Scandinavian countries, Russia, Germany, and Canada ranking in that order. Four out of 10 were natives of North Dakota. Three out of 4 of the fathers of the 1,500 interviewed farm operators were born in European countries or Canada, and, of these, the Scandinavian countries ranked first with nearly half, followed by Germany, Russia, and Canada in that order. Only 1 in 35 was born in North Dakota.

Apart from members of the farm household, women working in the harvest were so few as to be without statistical significance. Rarely was a local woman found shocking grain for hire. A Czechoslovakian woman of 118 pounds panted among bundles of durum, doing two men's work and earning two men's wages at an acreage rate of pay, for the support of her family on their own drought-stricken farm. Or a transient woman shocker might be one who had followed her husband into the State with hopes of employment as harvest cook. Or at one of the transient centers a woman lived in a tent while her man looked for work.

Age of Laborers

It is remarkable that local hired harvest laborers, while in larger proportion foreign born, averaged younger than transients. And both labor groups together averaged younger than harvest labor used to be in those earlier years; in the 1938 harvest half were as young as 25 years or less. In the early 1920's, of 1,161 workers interviewed, less than 4 out of 10 were under the age of 25. (6, p. 8).

Employment and Earnings

These facts about the larger groups sampled in the harvest do little more than identify them. In a society which recognizes "front" as a primary virtue, earning power is of primary importance. Education, training, and skill are some of the attributes which are said to enter into the ability to get and hold good jobs. These attributes should therefore have had something to do with the sort of jobs harvest workers held during the preceding months, how regularly they worked, and what earnings they could command; providing, of course, they could obtain the type of work for which they were trained.

The amount of shifting between jobs and the amount of unemployment are influential in determining what the earnings at the end of a year will have been. For farm workers and a scattering of others, the value of the food and shelter furnished may constitute as much as the money pay for a year's work. All groups that gave information as to their work history gave the number of months during which they received perquisites, and the value of these may be added to the earnings discussed below, roughly, at a rate of \$1.11 per day, or \$33.30 per month. (This figure was derived from the answers of 1,200 farmers as to what it cost them to provide board and room for harvest hands.) As the outlay for food was probably greater during the heavy manual labor of the harvest, any error in using this period as a criterion would be in the direction of overstatement.

Shifting from job to job usually means loss to the worker. In 18 months; the 1,904 hired harvest workers who gave information on this point changed jobs an average of three and one-third times. There was no significant difference between the experience of the various groups in this regard.

Likewise, a characteristic common to all of those working for hire was unemployment, but there was less among groups closely identified with farm work. Thus, men hired to do farm work by the month or season showed a very much lower incidence of unemployment, there being slightly less than 2 months lost in the course of 18 months. The amount of relief work done by regular hired hands was very much less than among other groups, averaging less than 20 days in the period of 18 months.

Unemployment of local hired harvest laborers was much higher, averaging slightly over 3-1/2 months out of the 18. Of these the ones whose work was primarily common labor other than on the farm did not lose quite so much time as some of the other groups, but they did show by far the highest amount of relief work. Thus, 52 who worked only at common labor lost by 3-1/4 months, yet worked 10-1/2 months on relief jobs during the 18. The same was true to a degree of those who combined common labor and farm labor. Of all these local laborers, the 20 percent who worked only at common labor, or who combined common labor with other secondary occupations, worked half of 18 months at

relief occupations, and were idle about 4 months. It is of interest that those individuals whose primary occupation was the skilled trades came next in the number of months on relief - 6 months out of 18 - and those with semiskilled trades followed with 4 out of 18 months on relief. Skilled workers lost 1-1/2 months during this time, as did semi-skilled workers.

Among the transients, reports of occupational status during the 18 months were completed for 1,251 workers. Considerably more time was lost by transients than by local hired harvest laborers during this period. The average was a little more than 5-1/2 months out of the 18. The amount of relief work done was very much smaller, however, being only 1 month out of the 18, and there was an average of 11-1/2 months of work other than relief work.

Among the more significant occupational groups represented among the transients, those working at common labor showed the largest amount of unemployment, with a loss of between 6 and 7 months out of 18. Farm laborers among them showed an average loss of over 5 months, with skilled workers losing nearly 7, and semiskilled workers nearly 6 months. Servants and semiskilled workers in manufacturing as well as common laborers had losses of from 6 to 7 months, whereas professional people, managers, and clerks were grouped with a loss of less than 5 months. The jacks-of-all-trades lost a little over 7, and the few common laborers who worked in manufacturing establishments lost nearly half of the 18 months covered. As a whole, half of the transients were out of work for more than 6 months out of 18, and another one-third were out of work between 5 and 6 months.

As with the North Dakota men, common laborers among the transients had the most relief work, but in comparison held such work about 2-1/2 months as against 10-1/2 months for the local laborers. Similarly, skilled laborers among transients held relief work 1-1/2 as against 6 months for local laborers. Without question, one reason for less relief work among transients was the requirement of 1 year's residence for eligibility in most States. "Make it easier for single men to get on relief," was a recommendation frequently heard among them.

It was expected that farm work would be the major occupation of the family workers and regular hired men; but it was somewhat surprising to find that among the transients more than two-thirds had worked on farms during the preceding 18 months, and 3 in 10 had done nothing but farm work during that time. More than three-fourths of the local hired harvest laborers had worked on farms, and for nearly half there was no other employment.

The average earnings of regular hired men doing farm work only were \$388 for 18 months. At similar work transients earned \$107 less and local laborers \$152 less in the same length of time.

The second largest occupational group worked at common labor and a combination of jobs including common labor. Their total earnings were somewhat above those of farm laborers. Among the latter, those who worked primarily at farm labor and less often at common labor showed smaller earnings than those who reversed the process. But if the value of perquisites were to be added at the average rate given by North Dakota farmers (\$33.30 per month), then earnings for farm laborers in many cases would surpass those of common labor.

Finally it should be noted that in spite of the large numbers who worked for a time at skilled trades or in the professions during the 18 months, their detailed reports showed that only 1 in 10 of the transients, 1 in 12 of the local laborers, and 1 in 50 of the regular hired men did not work at either common or agricultural labor during this period, and of these, many were students.

Semiskilled workers, both local and transient, had earnings above those of either farm or common laborers, and skilled workers topped them by even greater amounts. Only small numbers of these groups had work histories definite enough to be classified. These were too few to show definite trends.

Average monthly earnings, excluding the effect of unemployment, and without giving a value for perquisites, were more in proportion to expectation. Clerks averaged from \$50 to \$76. The highest figure of all was \$113.75 received by skilled transients, with skilled local laborers averaging about \$40 less. Semiskilled workers, with those in manufacturing leading the way, received the next highest average monthly wages. Farm labor earned about half the monthly cash wages of common labor, which received an average close to \$45. As farm laborers receive perquisites, especially board and lodging, much more regularly than do common laborers employed in town, the addition of the values of perquisites would have brought the actual monthly earnings for farm laborers above those of common laborers except in manufacturing.

Education of Laborers

Formal education, as apart from skill acquired in the course of practicing a trade, usually is considered a major factor in preventing unemployment, and in providing security. A correlation of the usual job and education, covering 3,285 persons among both paid and unpaid laborers, indicated no very certain relation between the usual job and the amount of education, two notable exceptions being that 50 percent of those working in manufacturing had about a twelfth grade or higher schooling, and that most of those with skilled trades had received some high-school training, one-fourth having completed the twelfth grade. Although it probably is not particularly significant, it is of interest that the average education of those holding odd jobs was well above the average. Mechanics and artisans and those engaged in transportation also had been to high school in comparatively large numbers.

Among the numerically less significant occupational groups, the handful who indicated that their work was in the professions had the highest level of education: 95 percent of these had been to college, and nearly one-third had been graduated. Nearly three-fourths of the clerical workers had completed the twelfth grade, and the same was true of those engaged in personal service. These last two groups, however, had so few cases that conclusion is not significant.

Completion of eight grades of schooling was the most typical answer, 4 out of 10 having stopped at this point. Including the 2 out of 10 who had not gone this far, nearly two-thirds of the interviewed men and women had not received schooling past the eighth grade. Of the remaining third, nearly as many completed the twelfth grade as dropped out during years preceding high school. Less than 1 in 17 had been to college, and not 1 in 100 had completed a 4-year college course.

Comparison of the educational attainments of the largest single occupational group, those customarily engaged in agriculture, with the average of the entire group, indicated slightly less formal schooling among those for whom agricultural employment was the usual work. Thus, 7 in 10 had gone no farther than the eighth grade, and only 3 out of 100 had attended college. Groups whose educational attainment was rather close to that of agricultural workers were those whose customary employment was in forestry, mining, and domestic work.

Differences between the various harvest-labor source groups regarding education were not especially significant. At the lower level, less than 4 out of 100 had stopped before the fourth grade in any group. At the upper level, male unpaid family labor led, 7 out of 100 having gone to college. They were closely followed by transients with 6, local hired harvest workers with 5, exchange workers with 4, female unpaid family workers with 3, and regular hired laborers with 1 out of 100 who had attended college. Groupings at completion of the eighth grade and above ranged from two-fifths of the transients to one-fifth of the exchange and regular hired workers who entered high school. Harvest workers of 1938 were better educated than they were in the 1920's, however, when only one-fifth had reached high school. And if exchange workers, 85 percent of whom were farm operators, fairly represented North Dakota grain farmers generally, then it could be said that apparently harvest laborers had more formal schooling than the farmers who employed them.

Skills

An impressive proportion of transients, nearly one-third, claimed training in the skilled trades; one-fifth of the local laborers, one-sixth of the regular hired men, and 1 in 14 of the family workers made the same claims. Half the transients, two-thirds of the local hired harvest laborers, and three-fourths of the regular hired men and half of the family workers claiming such skills were classified as artisans, primarily in the building trades. But these

artisans practiced their vocations less than those who are skilled in forestry, mining, manufacturing, transportation, commerce, and kindred trades. In fact, only half the artisans among the transients, one-third among the local hired harvest laborers, and one-sixth among family workers and regular hired men claimed that they usually practiced their trades, a condition which was reflected almost exactly in the 18-month work history of these same groups.

Offsetting this condition, significantly larger numbers claimed usual jobs in the other skilled trades mentioned than claimed specific training in them, a situation which was reflected, likewise, in the work history.

That so many men with definite skills should have been seeking harvest work is only another indication of the wastes inherent in unemployment and in a lack of positive guidance of men to jobs for which they are fitted. Yet, although unemployment has stalked the avenues of the skilled trades as well as of the unskilled manual workers' usual employment, other research findings have indicated an advantage enjoyed by laborers who are trained for skilled trades in making readier adaptation when technical unemployment or depression has caused them to lose their jobs. The evidence of this study clearly indicates the low contribution that the North Dakota grain harvest can make to maintain these laborers during the year. And because technology has proceeded in industrial employment to an even greater extent than in agriculture, the job alternatives for untrained or unskilled laborers in the cities have become increasingly less.

The serious handicap of individuals who do not have particular skill has been stressed by students of the youth problem in recent years. There are definite indications that youth from the underprivileged areas, lacking opportunities for school and for apprentice training in particular trades, are badly handicapped in their competition with the city boy or girl who, because of place of birth and rearing, has somewhat greater possibilities for learning and acquiring experience in skilled trades. This lack of training apparent among a most significant section of society, both rural and urban, points to a definite problem that society in general must recognize if these young people are to have an opportunity to function as responsible members of society.

Age at Beginning Work

The typical harvest laborer first began working regularly part or full time at a fairly early age. Four out of 10 started before they were 14 years old (some before they were 10), and 7 out of 10 before they were 16. Very few waited until their twentieth birthday or later.

Rural Youth -- A Problem of Opportunity

A large number of young people, their schooling over, their parents well able to dispense with their services, stayed on at home in the position of dependents although they had adult capacities and desires for economic independence. It is curious enough that although over two-thirds of the interviewed farm-family male workers were from 16 to 30 years old--surely the most adventurous period of a person's life--only 11.8 percent of all males had left home to seek work. In the same age group were only a little more than one-half of the female harvesters interviewed, yet 14.6 percent of all the females had at some time gone away to look for work. By slight odds, the gentler sex seems to have been the more adventurous. The record shows that the girls had a little better luck in finding work, and that they worked a little longer when they found it, the average being 1 year and 4 months for the girls, and 1 year and 1 month for the boys.

It may be that fewer males left the farm because they were needed at home more often than the females. But there is little evidence for the view in the responses they made to the question why they quit the jobs they obtained. The reason given oftener than any other was that they were thrown out of work. It is the reason given by 4 out of 10 of those of both sexes reporting. About one-fifth of both sexes left because they were needed at home, and a few left because the work was too irregular or the pay too low.

For some young farm people, feelings of inferiority stand in the way of their leaving home to look for work. The farming one-fourth of a nation that rears and educates one-third of the nation's children on one-tenth of the national income (7, pp. 3-4) is ill-equipped to give its youth anything like a feeling of equality with better-advantaged urban youth. The average school attainment of 3,400 harvest workers was barely above eight grades. The average farm-family youth with his grade schooling may wonder how he should hope to get steady work when the transient his father hires for the harvest couldn't keep employed--although often better schooled than he and about 1 in 3 being skilled in industrial employments. Half a loaf may look better to him than no bread. Besides, farming is what he knows, and he thinks he doesn't know much else. Others have placid temperaments and are not deeply ruffled by winds of desire to alter their situations. And some are under the thumb of parents who, for good reason or for ill, want them about. If he left the farm, a young man of 22 explained, he was afraid the "old man" would never let him come back. So he stayed, wageless but working. Some day he would inherit.

Thus feelings of inferiority, inertia, parental domination, and a faculty for long and quiet waiting, kept thousands of farm youth off the labor market during the depression years. To this situation must be added that of widespread nonagricultural unemployment which forced former farm people back to their home farms.

Numerous illustrations of these human problems were found. One reported by an enumerator follows:

"A man of 57 years sits of an August evening on a nail keg before the bunk house. It is 7:30, and he has just come from the kitchen. He has worked his 10 hours today, and over the cheekbones of his lean, intelligent face there is a flush that recedes into the gray hair at his temples and that is the outward sign of his heart disease. He was born on a Kentucky farm and has been boilermaker, machinist, railroad engineer, and section foreman. These jobs lost, he has gone back to the pursuit in which he was reared, farming. But for the last 6 years he has had spells of breathlessness; he staggers, or he faints. Last year he had to quit seeding, and again while driving binder in the harvest. The work was too much for him. Last winter he was flat on his back. And in seeding time this spring he had to quit again. In the work in which he started, he is running through the last days of a comparatively short life."

If he was not typical of harvest labor generally, it was because he had commanded labor skills above the attainment of 2 out of 3 of his kind, and because his age anticipated what is the future for most. He did exemplify a large proportion of harvest labor in this respect: born and bred on the farm, he came back to it when other ways proved to be dead ends.

Many who approach his years are men who have essayed the first steps on the agricultural ladder toward farm ownership, but who have found their feet paralyzed, as the bottom rung continued to knife into their arches. One can still see them in the harvest, eager young fellows out to make their stake by day labor so that presently they can rent their own farms, then by dint of more hard work and second mortgages buy them, and in the end own them.

That has been the dream of generations of American farm youth, and generations have lived in the fulfillment of the dream. But no generation of American farm youth was ever reared in a time less favorable to that enterprise than the decade of the 1930's. And so in great numbers they hang there on the bottom rung, at the level of agricultural laborers. In addition, the bottle neck of industrial unemployment had kept on the farms and committed to farm labor those lads who wanted to get away from the farm. And it kept them at it for years.

In one township the splitting up of farms to provide for oncoming sons has proceeded to a point where little further subdivision is possible. So strongly ingrained is the wish to stay with their own people, that a serious obstruction has come to the normal aspirations of the once younger generation. Not so young now, a 32-year old "unpaid farm laborer" answered the question of what was his greatest problem with "get me a wife" And he might have added what others in his condition had said specifically: "And a place to keep her."

In a western county an essentially similar condition was reported by the enumerator:

"One fellow we talked to was about 30 years old and had worked on this farm for more than 10 years. In that length of time he had managed to save a little over \$100. (He was one of the three laborers interviewed who had any money in the bank.) He was pretty much disillusioned and was about ready to resign himself to a life as a hired man. Ten years of his life had been wasted, he said, and there was nothing better in sight. He wished the Government would do something to make it easier for young fellows to get hold of farms of their own. He asked us some questions about the Farm Tenancy bill. He seemed to think that we ought to have a bill that was modeled after the recommendations of the President's committee on Farm Tenancy One of the first boys we talked to was a high-school graduate who was trying to get money to go to college. He didn't have any ideas as to what the Government should do to help out agriculture, but he did think that more NYA work should be offered and that student loans should be continued... "If my dad could just get a fair crop and a decent price once in a while he could help me get started on a farm of my own, but this way I haven't got much chance."

Property Holdings of Laborers

The harvest laborers in 1938 who were trying to save money to buy farms and farm equipment were more than two-fifths of all the males interviewed. Among exchange workers they were more than two-thirds, more than one-half of regular hired men and farm family males, just two-fifths of local hired harvest labor, and a little less than one-third of the transients. They were trying to save, they said. But the will was clearly far in excess of means. Many said - soberly, or with a shrug or a smile - "What's the use?"

Only about 1 in 20 of 3,264 workers canvassed in the harvest had a bank account. Of those who did have money in the bank, the accounts of farm-family females were the slimmest, averaging \$158.75, and those of the exchange workers most, \$299, with the transients' average accounts of \$235.50 ranking next to the top. It is curious that regular hired men, whose earnings in the last 18 months before the 1938 harvest were higher than the earnings of either local labor or transients, should have savings less than those of either of the other two groups. But in general it may be said that about 1 harvest worker in 20 averaged enough laid by to pay for hospitalization and a major operation, if he picked his doctor carefully and convalesced quickly.

The proportion of farm-family males (4.5 percent) who had money in the bank came nearest to the average for all labor groups. And only the exchange workers exceeded them in the frequency with which they were trying to save in order to farm for themselves. The disproportion

between those trying to save (54.9 percent) and those with money in the bank (4.5 percent) is a speaking contrast. Of course, most farm-family males were young; more than 6 out of 10 were under 21 years. But there were proportionately 3 times as many farm-family males aged 26 to 50 years as there were bank accounts among all ages of this harvest labor group. That about one-seventh were of these ages is a sign of how long farm-family status may last for some men, in something less than economic independence, and of how even the first steps on the agricultural ladder are, for many, too steep an ascent.

Not all farm family labor, of course, occupied positions of dependence. They were variously paid. Some had nothing but their living expenses and perhaps the use of the farm automobile. Some received generous allowances. Others had the return from a certain acreage or from certain livestock. Some occupied positions of responsibility and were indispensable to their families' conduct of farm operations. Said a farmer in Stutsman County, "When my boys get married, I give them a quarter of land, six horses, some machinery, and some money in the bank. Before then they work for me." Asked about his daughters: "I give them a cook stove, a cow, some chickens, and I help their man."

A small proportion of the hired harvest hands were farm owners, about 4 percent among 2,243. The average acreage reported was 217; and value \$3,421. Nearly three-fourths of these farms were located in North Dakota, and one-eighth in Minnesota. The proportion of farm owners among transients was higher than that among the regular hired men, and higher among local labor than among either of the other groups. Conforming with the frequently published statement that in the United States the "weaker sex" is also the wealthier sex, a larger proportion of farm-family women than men owned farms. Expectedly, exchange workers, who were not a labor group except incidentally to farm management as the usual thing, were in the largest proportion (31.6 percent) farm owners. More than one-half these owners of farms operated them. Farm tenancy among hired harvest laborers was rather less common than farm ownership, being under 4 percent. For local hired harvest laborers and regular hired men the figure is 6 percent; for transients about $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent. About the same proportion of transients and farm-family females were farm tenants (2.5 percent). Proportionately five times as many farm family men were tenants, as were more than half the exchange workers.

Ownership of other real estate than farm property was rare. It was limited to fewer than 2 percent of 3,400 harvest workers. Just about 2 percent of the transients, 3.7 percent of local hired men, and fewer than 1 percent of other harvest-labor groups owned properties, the chief use of which was to house themselves. The average value of these was \$1,453. Nearly two-thirds of them were located in North Dakota and one-sixth in Minnesota.

The laborers interviewed were better provided with life insurance than with real estate. Of 3,292 harvest workers answering, about one-sixth were insured. Proportionately more exchange workers were insured than any other group. Only the transients came within 5 percent of them. The group with the largest proportion of uninsured were the farm women, next to them the regular hired men. Farm-family, transient, and local hired harvest men stood between; 1 in 7 having coverage. The two groups having the largest number of insured individuals likewise averaged the highest in face value of policy for those who were insured. The exchange workers, whose life insurance coverage averaged \$2,337 for those having it, were insured for about twice as much as regular hired men and farm family and local labor. Transient coverage was lower than that of exchange workers by nearly \$700.

Social Security benefits were available to nearly two-fifths of 3,308 harvest workers answering, to almost two-thirds of the transients, to two-fifths of local labor, to 1 in 8 farm-family males, to fewer than 1 in 10 of the exchange workers, to about 1 in 8 of the regular hired men, but to only 1 in 80 farm-family females. As a means of learning work history, particularly as between city and farm, reference to Social Security participation is indicative only as it shows a maximum number who at one time or another probably engaged in covered employment, and it cannot be used as a measure even of the usual place of employment. (Social Security numbers must be obtained by wage workers engaging in covered employment; others may request and receive them.) This is well shown by the fact that a much larger proportion of the farm-family women worked out than had Social Security coverage. But their principal occupation away from home is domestic service which is not covered by the Social Security law.

Marital Status and Dependents

The number of harvest workers with life insurance holdings was less by far than the number of those whose obligations and responsibilities included the support of dependents. Of 3,333 harvest workers answering, more than 1 in 7 was married. Three-fifths of the exchange workers were married, one-third of farm family females, one-fifth of local labor, more than one-seventh of the regular hired men, 1 in 9 of the transients, and 1 in 13 of the farm-family males surveyed. In this sense also, apparently, transients were more footloose than any other group except farm-family males.

But marriage did not circumscribe their responsibilities of support for others. Although hardly more than 1 in 7 was married, almost 1 in 4 had others dependent on him. Again, it was the exchange group that had the most to report in the way of dependents, two-thirds of them having such responsibilities. But, next to them, one-third of the local laborers were so burdened, about one-quarter of the transients and regular hired men, and about 1 in 10 of both the farm-family males and females. When farm-family women harvest laborers had dependents, they were likely to have them in number; they averaged almost 5 each. Exchange laborers who had dependents averaged almost 4, and the other groups up to slightly more than 3 each.

The place of any social group in the workaday world is fixed by such characteristics as type of work and ability to produce earnings; problems incident to getting and holding a job, or of getting started and making a go of it on the farm; the degree of security as evidenced by bank accounts, life insurance policies, and participation in the benefits of the Social Security Act; the ownership of property; the degree of responsibility to others as shown by the numbers dependent on them. Although harvest labor played a significant but varying part in the lives of those interviewed in North Dakota in the summer of 1938, in a sociological sense there was no permanent group that could be called harvest laborers, but rather a series of groups of varying permanency, loosely named for the purposes of this study as "farm-family males," "farm-family females," "regular hired men," "exchange workers," "local hired harvest laborers," and "transients."

It is with the description of the workaday characteristics of these more permanent groups in a nonharvest setting that this part of this study has been concerned. That these characteristics, together with the less tangible patterns traceable to habit and cultural heritage, determine the broad outline of the attitudes and noneconomic actions of these people, is evident. It is likewise true that in group activities, and in search for entertainment, people often express themselves most freely. An attempt was therefore made to provide a factual basis for description of such activities through a series of questions concerned with participation of harvest workers in community life.

Connection with Economic Organizations

Of organized groups, most closely allied to the problems of making a living are labor unions and farm organizations. Among farm operators interviewed, about 1 in 3 belonged to a farm organization, and of these more than 3 out of 4 were members of the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union, 1 in 8 of the Farmers Equity Union, 1 in 20 of the Farm Holiday Association, and the remainder in a scattering of national and local organizations. A few were members of more than one farm organization.

Of the 3,387 answers received from harvest laborers, 208, or approximately 6.0 percent, claimed membership in unions, and of these 86 percent were transients. Not more than 6 individuals claimed membership in any specific union, and the majority of replies were simply "A. F. of L." or "C. I. O." In these two organizations, membership was almost equally divided, with 40 percent in the A.F. of L., 39 percent in the C. I. O., and 21 percent in railroad, unaffiliated or local shop unions. The amount of membership in the A. F. of L. trade unions serves to re-emphasize the fact that a good proportion of the harvest workers are skilled workers who are taking employment outside their trade, because of necessity.

Connection with Fraternal Organizations

In many communities membership in lodges and similar types of organizations is a direct measure of social status. Of the 3,378 who answered the question concerning their membership in such organizations, 136 - one in 25 - claimed membership. Most of the secret organizations limit membership to men, a situation which is reflected in the fact that none of the farm women interviewed belonged to lodges. Of the male groups, those most definitely representing farm operators - the exchange workers - belonged to lodges in the greatest proportion, 1 in 12 having such memberships. Of the other masculine groups, such memberships were claimed by 1 in 20 of the local laborers, 1 in 23 of the transients, 1 in 28 of the hired men, and 1 in 35 of the farm family workers.

The evidence is plain that few of the harvest workers express the desire for status through membership in secret organizations, either because they were not able or because they did not care to. As to the specific organizations to which the handful belonged, a number, such as the Woodmen of the World, were definitely associated with insurance, while Masons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Columbus led among the more strictly fraternal types.

Entertainment

If the farm-family group, both men and women, sought membership least in secret organizations, these young farm folks participated most in community activities, such as school and church entertainments, dances, picnics, rodeos, and socials. The transients, who as a group have least roots even in the communities which they call home, went least to community entertainments, and when on the road their attendance was negligible. The exchange workers which averaged the oldest of the remaining groups, showed the lowest participation in community affairs; 4 out of 10 had gone to them. Hired men and the local workers, about half of whom participated, stood between the exchange workers and farm-family groups.

Another opportunity for social participation, conducted on a wider scale and touching the economic activities of the farm groups, was provided by local, county, and state fairs. Attendance varied from exchange workers, 3 out of 10 of whom went, to 4 out of 10 of both groups of farm-family workers and of hired men. In between were the other groups, including the transients while at home. On the road, however, only 1 transient in 12 attended fairs.

Surpassing all other modes of entertainment was attendance at movies, circuses, and carnivals, and here again the farm-family males exceeded all others in the proportion attending, although in number of times the 3 out of 4 of this group who went to 16 shows a year were surpassed, by almost twice, by the 2 out of 3 transients who attended shows at home. Even while on the road, 1 out of 4 transients went to movies or circuses an average of 14 times during the year. This evidence indicates that

shows, which are nonparticipating activities, provided by far the greatest chance for entertainment for transients on the road. Exchange workers went to shows least, half of them averaging about 8 times a year. Six out of 10 farm-family women went to an average of 8 shows. Likewise, 6 out of 10 of the regular hired men, and 2 out of 3 of the local hired harvest laborers, males, had gone to shows, with the former averaging 18 during the year, and the latter 22.

As further evidence that the farm-family men got around locally more than their fellows is the fact that 2 out of 3 of those interviewed had gone to exactly 10 ball games on the average. The next highest proportion was found among the local hired harvest laborers, a little more than half of whom averaged 12 ball games a year, and the transients, a little less than half of whom went to 16 ball games while at home. One out of 8 transients went to an average of 7 ball games while on the road. Of the remaining groups, one-third of the farm-family women workers of the harvest, 4 out of 10 of the exchange workers, and nearly half of the regular hired men attended an average of 8 games.

Young people need a chance to meet others in a wholesome atmosphere, and students of rural problems are devoting increasing attention to this need. This problem was put directly by a 19-year old high-school graduate from a western county of the State (where he said there was no crop), who thought that "the greatest problem of workers like me is to keep away from drinking and tearing around."

Visits Made

There may be room for question whether or not a visit of a few days to relatives is a form of recreation or entertainment, but that visits did provide a means of getting away from immediate surroundings for a while was evidenced by the answers given. Thus, nearly half of the farm-family female workers in the harvest made an average of 6 visits during the year; and a little larger proportion than 4 out of 10 of the farm-family males and the exchange workers made an average of 8 visits. About 1 in 3 of the regular hired men and the local workers visited friends and relatives an average of 7 times, while less than 1 in 13 of the transients, who were traveling anyway, stopped off for this purpose. Less than 3 out of 10 transients said that making visits to friends and relatives even while at home was one of their social activities. Perhaps here is portrayed most clearly the aloneness and lack of social contacts of at least a large proportion of those who were on the road.

Religious Activities

Attendance at church and other religious meetings is considerably removed from the type of activities so far canvassed, yet in a very real sense such participation provides an outlet not only for the religious life of the individual, but also for an exercise of his

neighborly impulses. It is therefore of interest that attendance at religious meetings formed by all odds the greatest single mode of social participation; and of the various groups, the farm-family women not only went in the greatest numbers but were the most faithful. Of the farm women included in the sample, 4 out of 5 averaged 36 times during a 12-month period; and the next highest participation, 2 out of 3, was among their brothers and neighbors in the masculine farm-family group, who attended about 28 times during the year. Of the exchange workers, 6 out of 10 attended church or religious meetings about 25 times on the average, and the local hired harvest workers, attended in equal numbers and about the same number of times. While at home, transients' attendance barely exceeded that of the regular hired men; half of them attended church. The transients while at home had an average attendance of 23 times a year, to 20 times for the regular hired men. While traveling, however, only about 1 in 8 of the transients went to church or religious meetings, and of these there was an average of 10 times.

Personal Problems and Government Action

The objective description of the problems and activities of the harvest laborers has so far taken little account of individual or group reactions to those problems. Such reactions, although subjective in nature, largely determine the course of action of the individual.

In order to get such an expression, two questions were asked the interviewed harvest workers: "What do you believe is now the greatest problem of workers such as you?" and "What do you believe is the governmental action most needed for the welfare of workers such as you?" Because of press of time in harvest work, some of the interviewed persons were not asked these two questions. Of the 3,400 harvest laborers interviewed, 1,162 either were not asked or did not reply concerning their greatest problem; and 1,593, or more than 25 percent more, either were not asked or did not answer what action they thought the Government should take. It should be safe to assume that this difference represents largely those who were able to state their problems, but who had no clear idea whether remedial action on the part of the Government would be beneficial nor what form such action might take.

Of the 1,611 harvest workers who answered both questions, 359 (22.3 percent) were farm-family males; 68 (4.2 percent) were exchange males; 38 (2.4 percent) were farm-family females; 65 (4.0 percent) were regular hired men; 290 (18.0 percent) were male local hired harvest laborers; and 791 (49.1 percent) were transients. With the exception of exchange workers (85 percent of whom were farm operators) who were somewhat above, and farm-family females, who were correspondingly below, almost equal proportions of each labor-source group answered the two questions, and the percentages given above approximate the proportion of all members of the various groups represented in the entire sample of 3,400.

The greatest proportion of the answers for all groups clustered about three problems: finding steady work; improving working conditions with respect, primarily, to wages and hours; and obtaining better crops and better crop prices. Suggested governmental action likewise fell into three main categories: provision of financial security for farmers; improvement of working conditions; and extension of relief measures.

Three-fourths of those stating their problem fell within the three categories given, and a little more than half suggested the three governmental actions named.

It is not unexpected that the greatest problem of local laborers and transients should be finding steady work, or that the greatest numbers should advocate an extension of relief measures as a means of meeting their particular problems. It was of interest, however, that with the exception of regular hired men, a significant portion of the various farm groups suggested an increase in work relief as a means of providing help. But the main problem of the greatest number of the farm groups, excepting again the regular hired men, was getting better crops and prices, and the largest number of all four farm groups thought that the best action of the Government would be to provide financial security for farmers. A number of local hired harvest workers, equal to that advocating increased relief, were of the same opinion.

Finding steady work was the problem of the second largest numbers of farm-family males and of regular hired men. The ties of the latter to the farm were evident from the fact that those answering believed the provision of financial security for farmers would help them most. Improvement of working conditions, particularly wages and hours, was the concern of the largest number of regular hired men, and of the second largest numbers of farm-family women, exchange workers, local hired harvest laborers, and transients; and of those giving this answer, only the local laborers thought that providing financial security for farmers would help them most, the others believing that the Government should intervene directly to improve working conditions. Some farm women expressed this opinion. This might seem surprising until it is remembered that many of them had been employed as domestics.

Significant numbers of both farm-family groups stated that their chief problem was getting an education. Their suggested action was for the Government to increase the amount of relief work, and this without question may be taken as an indication of the effectiveness and popularity of the NYA program among those most concerned.

Several other answers were received in a scattering fashion from those interviewed. Thus, 1 in 25 thought that choosing a vocation and getting established was his greatest problem, while about 1 in 15 including most of those just mentioned, thought that an extension of the rural rehabilitation program would be most helpful. It is noteworthy that while 1 in 30 thought the Government should decrease relief, less than 1 in 500 thought the rural rehabilitation program should be decreased.

About 1 in 150 thought there should be improvement in the public employment service, and 1 in about 250 said that better rural education should be provided.

Persons who are afraid of revolution on the part of the "depressed classes" may take comfort from the fact that but 1 in 33 advocated a change in the economic system. Of these, 9 out of 10 were transients, and less than 1 in 100 of the other groups advocated economic change. Not without significance is the fact that of the transients advocating economic change, two-thirds said that their greatest problem was finding steady work, and that only 1 in 8 complained of working conditions as such.

The pros and cons of displacement of men by machinery are heard so often that it is surprising that only 1 in 35 said that their own problem was a result of such displacement, and that only 1 in 40 thought that the Government ought to legislate a reduction in the use of labor-saving machinery.

Not to be neglected, of course, are the 1 in 25 who said they had no particular problems, nor the 1 in 8 who believed that no action should be taken by the Government. Of these was a young man who had yet to realize the most depressing experiences of the road. He was set apart from most of his fellows by a buoyant refusal to become discouraged, yet he was typical in the independence and loneliness of many of his kind. Let the enumerator describe him:

"Russ was a nice-looking chap -- clear, browned skin, small features, smiling eyes. He smiled often; and when he did one gold tooth gleamed like a stray kernel of corn in a handful of wheat.

"He had had a good job, he said -- never got below 65 cents an hour, but he quit because 'my feet began to itch.'

"I've never been fired from a job in my live. I've always quit. I quit because I won't take any dirt from anyone.'

"On the way out Russ stopped off for 2 weeks in Wisconsin to work for a farmer -- haying. The work was hard for him, the hours long (14 to 16 a day) so he quit.

"The farmer was mad because I didn't give him notice. 'But,' I asked him, 'would you give me a week's notice if you were going to fire me?'"

"After I left the farm the first thing I did when I went into town was to go into a tavern. Got there about 9 o'clock and stayed until it closed. I bought drinks for everyone in the place. I was lonesome and wanted someone to talk to, so I'd call to some fellow to come and sit down and have a drink. Most of the guys there were farm workers and they were only too glad to get a free drink.'

"How much money did you run through?' I asked him.

"Oh, about \$15 --all I had. I even got so bad before the night was over that I ordered a couple of hamburgers and fed them to the proprietor's dog. That's how much of a fool I made of myself.'

"He turned his attention to the coffee boiling in a large tin can over the jungle fire. By his side was a package of buns he had mooched from a baker-wagon driver, and some tomatoes he no doubt "lifted". As he poured his coffee into a tomato can, he asked, "Want a bite, buddy?"

"No, I just had breakfast," I edged in quickly,

"Well, I don't blame you," he grinned knowingly. "I won't like it either."

"Resuming his monologue to his attentive audience of one, 'I hate to beg for food. I only do it when I have to. I'm not like most of these buns. A lot of them lie around in the freight cars and mooch sandwiches and cigarettes from any other one that comes along.' (Evidently, by his tone of disgust, to mooch from a bun is the very lowest form of panhandling).

"As he sipped his bitter, black coffee and ate the dry bun, he spoke of shaving as soon as he had put a little between the two sides of his belt.

"How do you shave out here?" I queried him,

"Oh, I've got a shaving kit in my bag." He opened the bag and brought out some of the articles to emphasize his point. "Here's a bathing suit I carry along; go in swimming whenever I get the chance."

"I arose and wished him good luck,

"Thanks. Same to you pard. You'll need it."

On an earlier page it was said that all groups in the harvest had this in common: a lack of security, low average earning power, and a lack of financial status. Not only by the objective information concerning their economic and social activities, but also by their answers to direct questions concerning their problems and what they thought their Government might do for them have the interviewed harvest laborers provided evidence of the accuracy of this characterization. These answers stressed that finding steady work, getting better working conditions, and getting better crops and crop prices, are serious problems for most harvest workers, and the answers reiterated the widely held opinion that the Government ought to provide financial security for farmers, expand work relief, and directly improve working conditions. A minority were "on the loose"; they admittedly did not want work. Yet, even here, the evidence indicates that many once had both the will and the ability to be useful citizens. If that will is broken, and the ability is dissipated, the loss is not only the individual's but also the Nation's.

APPENDIX

METHODS USED IN THE NORTH DAKOTA HARVEST LABOR SURVEY

The great cereal-producing area of the nation today lies west of the Mississippi in the Great Plains States, and of these States the two largest producers of wheat are Kansas and North Dakota. Because use of the combined harvester-thresher had reached such proportions in the major wheat-producing areas of Kansas that the trend had been arrested at a point somewhere near the limit of mechanization at present levels of technology, and because an opportunity was sought for measuring the labor requirements of a variety of harvest methods, North Dakota was chosen as the State in which the study should be centered. A brief survey of Kansas harvest practices was made to furnish comparisons with those found in North Dakota. 8/ In the latter State, the displacement of older methods had progressed less rapidly, with the use of binders and stationary threshing machines still predominating. Headers were used in a few limited areas, while throughout the State there was a steady but not spectacular increase in the use of combines.

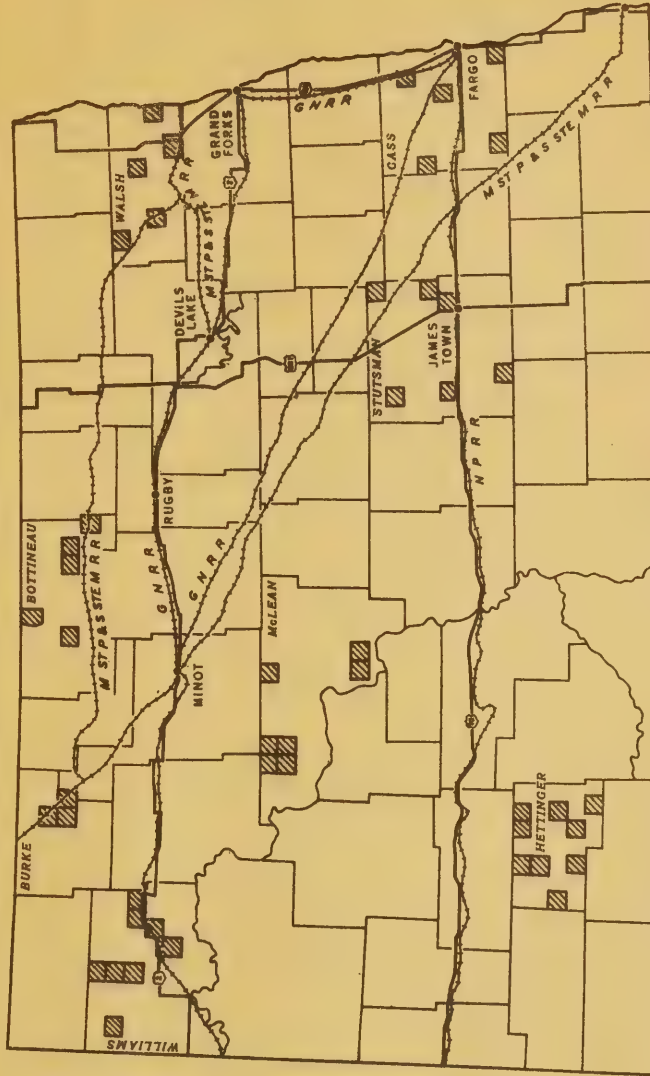
This situation provided the opportunity for measuring labor requirements of a variety of harvest methods, and permitted an estimate of the trend of labor requirements. This trend began about 1925 when the first combine was brought to North Dakota; the widespread use of this equipment in 1938 therefore represents a net gain within the space of 13 years. (2, p. 4) A second point from which to measure trends is provided by the reports published by the United States Department of Agriculture, which deal with the harvest labor problem of the post-World-War years. (4, 5, 6).

Basic data concerning the use of labor and harvest machinery were obtained in the field from 1,500 farm operators of North Dakota during the late summer of 1938. These were supplemented by data secured from 395 farms in Kansas early in 1939. Counties representative of the chief grain-producing areas were chosen with the advice of staff members of the Experiment Stations and Extension Services in both North Dakota and Kansas. Within the counties chosen, the county agricultural agents were asked to assist in the selection of representative townships.

In addition, 3,400 schedules were taken in 1938 of harvest laborers in the North Dakota counties, and at Fargo, Grand Forks, Devils Lake, Rugby, Minot, and Jamestown, centers where transient labor congregates (fig. 9). The information gathered covered the general social and economic background, and harvest work record, of the men working in the harvest.

8/A brief description of the Kansas harvest begins on p. 60

PRINCIPAL ROUTES OF TRAVEL OF TRANSIENT HARVEST LABORERS, AND TOWNSHIPS AND CENTERS
IN WHICH SCHEDULES WERE TAKEN, NORTH DAKOTA, 1938



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Figure 9. The principal railroad and highway routes used by transient harvest laborers are shown. From them the laborers travel to all parts of the harvest areas, using local highways and branch railroads not shown here. Most transient laborers enter the State from the East and in fewer numbers from the South. After the harvest most of them leave in the same directions.

One indication of the adequacy of this technique for application of data to the State as a whole is found in the distribution of farms by size as compared with the actual distribution shown in the 1935 and 1940 Censuses. The sample and census distributions nearly agreed.

Estimates of total labor use for the various sample counties and for the State were obtained by relating sample data to these larger areas on the basis of the proportion of all small-grain acreage harvested to that reported in the sample. This appeared to be justifiable because of the close relationship between sample data and such reliable standards of measurement as the census and the State Agricultural Statistician's reports. The method used to compute the total labor-use estimates, showing how data were computed both for county and State, is embodied in formulae as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Man-days required by sample farms | X | Acres of grain harvested in sample county <u>2/</u> | Man-days re- quired to har- vest total acre- age in sample county. |
| | | Acres of grain harvested on sample farms | |
| Man-days required by sample farms | X | Acres of grain harvested in State <u>2/</u> | Man-days re- quired to har- vest total acre- age in State |
| | | Acres of grain harvested on sample farms | |

During the field work in North Dakota, the enumerators worked in pairs. They always requested a farm operator's permission before interviewing his laborers. Laborers interviewed were promised that all individual information would be kept confidential. Refusals to give information or to permit the interviewing of workers were few.

Six principal groups of labor formed the harvest labor supply: The farm operator, members of his family, regular hired men (hired by the year or season), exchange labor (of neighbors or their men), local hired harvest labor (originating locally and hired for specific harvest jobs), and finally the transient or "floater." The first three classes comprised the occupants or labor resident on the farms. Local labor was defined for the purpose of the survey as all labor (other than family, season, or exchange) resident within the county or a county adjoining that of interview, while a transient was defined as a person whose home was beyond an adjoining county. Most transients were from outside of North Dakota. The data on farm use of harvest labor were obtained from farm operators, and those from individual laborers were taken from all classes of harvest workers except the farm operators.

2/ Total acreages of grain harvested by counties and for the State were taken from the preliminary estimates of the North Dakota Agricultural Statistician.

The number of man-days required for 100 acres handled with the direct combine varied little between North Dakota and Kansas. The size of combines tended to be larger and the working day longer in Kansas than in North Dakota. The outstanding difference was found in the binder-thresh method. This operation was a minor part of total operations in Kansas; individual acreages harvested by this method were small and the movement of separators from farm to farm was frequent, with lessened efficiency the natural results. Heading required approximately the same number of man-days per 100 acres in both States.

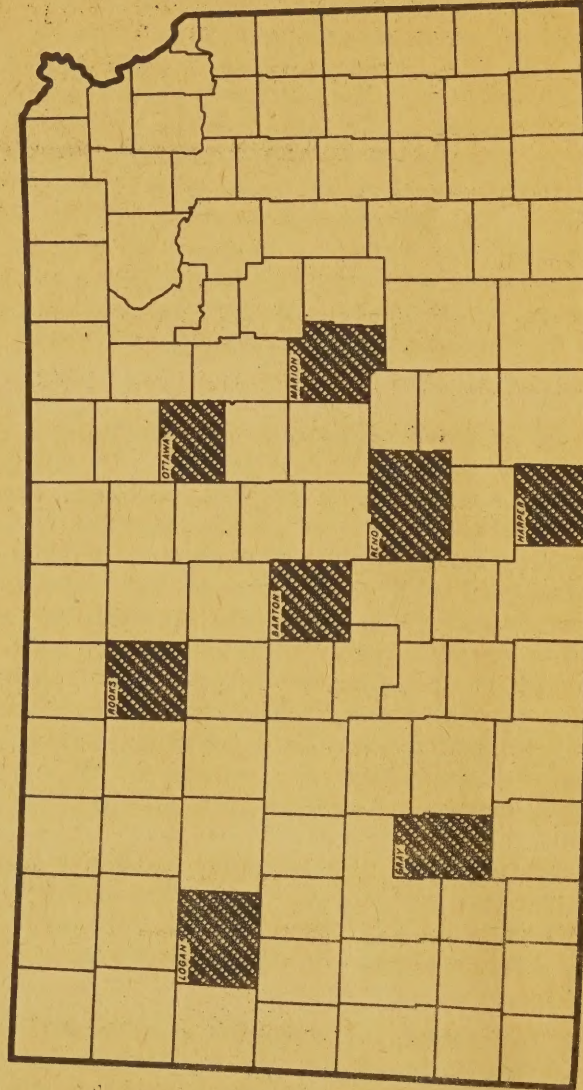
Because of the extensive use of combines, the average number of man-days required per 100 acres harvested was less than half as great in Kansas as in North Dakota, and with a greater total small-grain acreage in 1938, it is a conservative estimate that Kansas used less than half as many man-days of labor to bring in the harvest. Of this labor, nearly 20 percent was furnished by transients, nearly 30 percent by local labor hired only for the harvest, and the remainder by farmers, members of their families, their hired men, and by the exchange of labor. The greater proportion of the work done by transients in Kansas, 20 percent of the total as against 15 percent in North Dakota, was offset to a large degree by the greater total labor requirements in North Dakota. The situation of 20 years ago when Kansas ranked first in the number of transients used in the small-grain harvest and North Dakota second, appeared to be reversed.

Differences of harvest technique were reflected in the kind and amount of work performed by the various labor groups. It was probable that in Kansas a transient would be a truck driver, shocker, tractor operator, field pitcher, or combine operator in that order, whereas in North Dakota, very few operated equipment of any kind. Exchange of work was similar in both States, and threshing provided the most work for this group. It is noteworthy that a higher proportion of jobs were held by exchange workers in Kansas than in North Dakota and a greater proportion of the threshing job was done on this basis. With over half of the farmers interviewed in Kansas reporting a decrease of exchange of labor and equipment, the continuation of exchange for threshing may have been partly due to a growing shortage of equipment as obsolescence increased. Possibly as a result of this situation, 17 Kansas farmers threshed with a combine rather than a separator.

The average numbers of harvest tasks held per worker in the harvest of 1938 on the Kansas farms surveyed was 1.2. The worker classes resident on the farms led with an average of 1.7 or more such jobs each. Other labor groups had single tasks or little more. These averages were slightly lower than those of North Dakota.

Rates of pay for combining compared fairly well between the two States, with a usual wage of \$3.50 to \$4 per day in Kansas and an average of \$3.47 for combine operators in North Dakota. Other harvest wages appeared to be somewhat higher in Kansas, in keeping with the greater use of hired labor around combines. In North Dakota the usual job for hired labor had a direct connection with the binder-thresh method, where little premium was paid for skill. Equal numbers of Kansas farmers reported that it was easier or that it was harder now to get harvest labor compared to 8 or 10 years ago. Of the former, a majority mentioned unemployment as the cause, of the latter 60 percent mentioned relief policies. A majority depended upon friends and previous contacts to obtain harvest help.

LOCATION OF KANSAS SAMPLE COUNTIES



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Figure 10. The hachured counties are those in which harvest labor requirements were studied.

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